



Mushroom Ghosts, Belligerent Yaks
&
Cranberry Cocktails

A Brag 'go Woman's Early Life

Tshes bcu lha mo བུ་ལྷ་མོ་

ISSN (print): 1835-7741

ISSN (electronic): 1925-6329

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008944256

DS1.A4739

UPLANDS—ASIA—PERIODICALS

TIBET, PLATEAU OF—PERIODICALS

CITATION: Tshes bcu lha mo (CK Stuart, ed). 2013. Mushroom Ghosts, Belligerent Yaks, and Cranberry Cocktails: A Brag 'go Tibetan Woman's Early Life. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 29.

SUMMARY: Tshes bcu lha mo, a native of Nor bu khug Village (Brag 'go Township, Brag 'go County Town, Dkar mdzes Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China) writes about her mother, her grandmother, and her great grandmother. She also describes her own childhood, including herding adventures, being attacked by a yak, education at home and in school, medical care, attending school in Zi ling (Xining), working in Lha sa and elsewhere in China, and attending school in the USA.

FRONT COVER: Tshes bcu lha mo in Helena, Montana (2013, Judy Smith).

BACK COVER: Tshes bcu lha mo's family and mother's cousin's family (June 2010, Bsod nams byams pa).



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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements <5>

**Map of Dkar mdzes (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous
Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China <6>**

PART ONE: MY MOTHER (YE SHES, B. 1967) <7>

1: A Deadly Earthquake <8>

2: Grandmother <16>

3: A Stepmother <25>

4: Marriage <33>

PART TWO: ME (LHA MO, B. 1988) <37>

5: A Late Arrival <38>

6: Yak Attack <42>

7: Slaughtering Pigs <47>

8: Tumbling Off a Horse <53>

9: A Ghostly Yak <59>

10: A Miserable Marriage <64>

11: Scalded <76>

12: Uncle Rin chen's Bar Brawl <85>

13: A Puppy <91>

14: A Fight With a Boy <97>

15: Mushrooms and a Ghost <104>

16: Visiting a Nomad Couple <113>

17: Yak Thieves <120>

18: First Day at Middle School <125>

19: Early Morning Surprises <131>

20: Admirable Boys <135>

21: Hard Work Pays Off <139>

22: Journey to Zi ling City <145>

23: Marc and Andrea <153>

24: Lha sa <156>

25: Bde Chen <163>

26: To the USA <172>

27: The New World <179>

28: Haircuts <183>

29: Drunk <187>

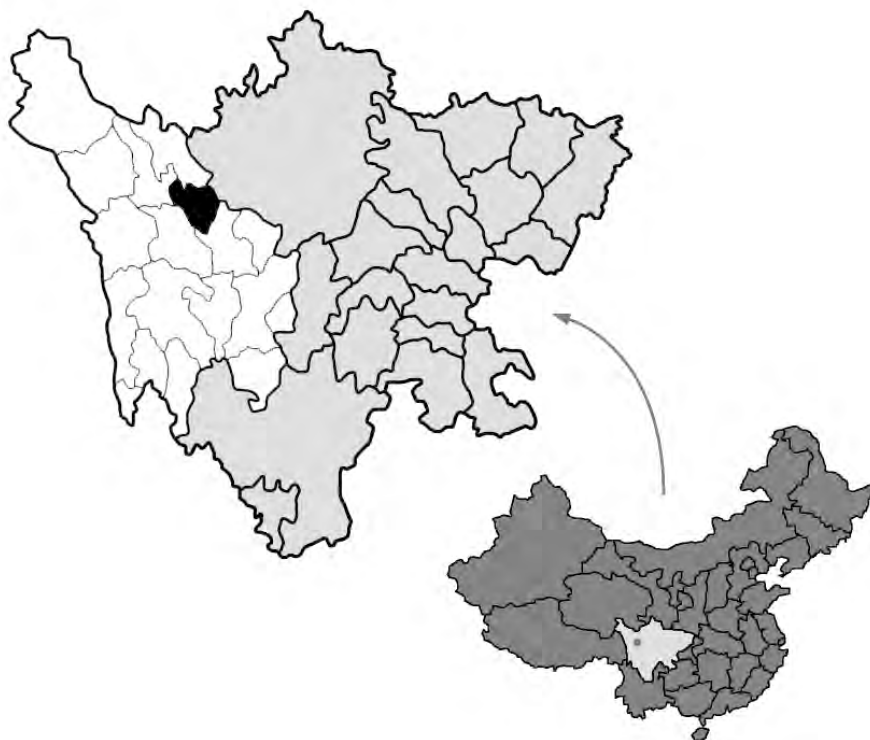
30: The Future <191>

Non-English Terms <194>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Gabriela Samcewicz, Gerald Roche, Timothy Thurston, Rinchen rdo rje, and Rose Hyson for helping with this book.

This map shows the location of Sichuan Province (light gray, bottom right) within China, and the location of Luhuo (Brag 'go) County (black) and Dkar mdzes (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (white), within Sichuan Province.¹



¹ This is a modified version of Croquant, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Garz%C3%AA_Prefecture_within_Sichuan_\(China\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Garz%C3%AA_Prefecture_within_Sichuan_(China).png), accessed 25 July 2013.

PART ONE

MY MOTHER

Ye shes (b. 1967)

A DEADLY EARTHQUAKE

Brag 'go (Luhuo) County Dkar mdzes (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China is located at the upper-middle section of the Xianshui River, in a region where there is frequent earthquake activity. Earthquakes greater than 6.0 magnitude occurred seven times between 1816 and 1973 in Brag 'go and nearby regions. Most notable were a 7.25 magnitude quake in 1923 and a 7.6 one in 1973. Local people suffered greatly. The 1923 and 1973 earthquakes happened in the same location within a fifty year period, which is rare for earthquakes. Judging from this, the danger of earthquakes in Brag 'go County is extreme. The 1973 earthquake resulted in the deaths of 2,199 people, destruction of 66,024 buildings, and a direct economic loss of 195 million RMB.²

It was the sixth day of Lo sar – the Tibetan Lunar New Year. We didn't have much to celebrate with. We couldn't even get meat. We had only rice and noodles. Still, all the villagers gathered to try and enjoy themselves on that cold, dusty day. Mother didn't allow me to go outside and play. "Don't go out. I'll cook your favorite food for dinner," she said. At that time, rice was my favorite food, and I enjoyed every precious opportunity to eat it, even though they were few and far between. I gladly stayed home.

I stayed in our small courtyard and played alone with my collection of garbage: bottles, cans, plastic bags, and nicely-shaped stones. At dusk, Mother called me to come to dinner. Father was changing Brother's pants when I came inside. "After dinner we'll go to bed. Why are you putting pants on Brother?" I asked.

Father answered, "He wet his pants."

"Ye shes, take off your new clothes or you'll get them dirty!" Mother shouted from our shabby kitchen.

² Edited and annotated from Cheng, FY and Wang YY. 1996. *Post-earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction*. New York: Pergamum, 203-204; and Ye Yaoxian. nd. *Chinese Experience With Post-Natural-Disaster Reconstruction*, <http://unpan1.un.org/intrados/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN025919.pdf>, accessed 6 February 2013.

I was eager to eat rice and shouted back, "I'll be careful when I eat. I won't get them dirty."

Father came and forced me to change my clothes.

I said, "Mother please cook quickly! I'm hungry."

She brought a plate of fried cabbage and Father brought the rice to the table. I happily jumped up and down and shouted, "Yay! There's rice to eat!"

My loud shout shocked Brother, who was just a year old, and he started crying. "Please take our dear son, I'll help here," Father said to Mother, handing me my red bowl full of rice. I stood by the table to eat. Father brought a small chair and said, "Don't eat standing up or you'll never grow up big and strong."

Mother held Brother and patted him to stop him crying. She sat on a simple chair with Brother in her lap as Father served us. During our meal, a very loud sound, like an explosion, suddenly came from the ground. Our shabby house shook, the bowls danced on the table, and then the house collapsed. I saw a beam fall on Mother and Brother as the house collapsed. Full of fear, I shouted to Mother, but then I lost consciousness.

It was very dark when I woke up. I wanted to get up, but something very heavy was on top of me. I couldn't move. I called, "Mother! Father!" There was no response. I struggled to get away from that heavy thing, but I felt so weak that I could hardly move. After about a half hour I heard someone calling, "Ye shes, where are you? Can you hear me?"

I wanted to answer but my mouth was aching and I couldn't open it. I reached out and grasped something to try and pull myself up, but whatever it was that I grabbed broke to pieces in my hand.

A voice said, "Brother, come here. I think she's here. I heard something."

"Ye shes, where are you? Please answer," Father said sadly.

I saw his dim outline in the moonlight. I tried very hard and managed to whisper, "Father, I'm here." Then, I used my left foot to make some noise, and finally, Father found me. He and his youngest sister began pulling the debris off me. Father was crying and said, "My dear daughter, how are you? Are you hurt?"

I was very sad when I heard Father sobbing. He wildly pulled things away from me, but it was an hour before he reached me. He embraced me tightly, but I pushed him away with my hands, because my jaw was very painful and his embrace had jarred it.

"My dear, are you OK?" he asked, and then took me to a small shack my Aunt had built out of the lumber from her house, which had also collapsed.

Father put me on a goat skin. I was too tired to move or talk, and I quickly fell asleep. When I woke up it was daytime. I was covered by a filthy blanket under a tattered tent.

I wanted to get up, but my head felt terribly heavy. I thought I must have lost my jaw. I heard footsteps. Too sore to talk, I scratched the tent. It was Father outside. He rushed to me and said, "Please don't move. I'll take you to the doctor." He kissed my cheek.

I was suddenly overwhelmed with sadness and began to cry. Tears flowed down my cheeks like beads falling from a broken string. "Father, I want Mother. Where are Mother and Brother?" I whispered.

His face became very pale. "My dear, they are too tired to get up. Today, I'll take you to the County Town to buy candy," he said, embracing me and crying.

"Brother! Hurry! The car is leaving," called Aunt from outside the tent.

"Ye shes, it's time to go," he said and wrapped me in an old, smelly blanket.

Our beautiful village was now nothing more than piles of rubble. The sky was full of dust swirling about on the frigid wind, which also carried the pitiful wails of seemingly countless villagers.

Aunt's house was in the village center and adjoined a wide, square yard used for village meetings and other communal activities. It was normally surrounded by a packed earthen wall that had now utterly collapsed. Many people were gathered there. They were mostly injured people and those who were helping them.

A doctor came and checked my jaw. He said something that I didn't understand. Father took me to a white van that could hold about twenty people. A young, beautiful doctor helped him put me in the van with other injured villagers. It was soon very crowded. There was very little room to sit.

"Father, don't leave me alone," I said when the beautiful doctor tried to close the van door.

"OK, I'll come," he said and, after talking with Aunt, got in and held me on his lap. When the van jerked and bounced over the rough road, people were knocked together and I felt great pain.

"Where are we going? Where are Mother and Brother?" I

asked Father.

"We are going to the County Town. Are you cold? I can give you my coat," said Father and held me tightly. But he didn't answer my question.

"Please tell me where Mother is! I don't want to go to the County Town, I just want Mother and Brother," I wailed. The beautiful doctor was sitting with us. She noticed my tears and gave me something to eat, but my mouth was so swollen I couldn't eat it, though I was very hungry. I had not eaten since the earthquake had struck.

When Father saw that I was trying to eat, he put the food in his mouth, chewed it, and then spat it into my mouth, in the same way that parents usually feed very young children. After swallowing some food, I fell asleep.

When I woke up I was sleeping in a very quiet room with several beds. The other patients were also sleeping. Everything in that room was white – white bed sheets, pillows, the walls, floor, ceilings, and everyone's clothes. I was amazed, and thought I must be dreaming.

My jaw ached. I touched it and noticed that it had been bandaged. "Father, where are you?" I called. I felt lonely and abandoned. I spoke loudly, forgetting the pain in my jaw.

The beautiful doctor who had given me food ran to me and said something, but I couldn't understand her.

Every morning the doctor came and changed my bandage. The hardest thing I had to do was swallow three tablets every morning. I cried because I didn't want to swallow them and then the other patients would say something like, "Girl, swallow those tablets. When your jaw is well, you can go home and be with your family."

This was sufficient incentive for me to swallow the tablets I was given. I often did not want to eat, but the nurses insisted. I was given well-cooked porridge that I ate with a spoon. I couldn't eat anything else for a long time afterwards. The nurses were like Mother – they fed me, washed my face, and helped me go to the toilet at night.

I was alone without my parents or Brother. The other patients all had at least one family member to help them. I felt bored just lying in bed receiving intravenous injections day after day.

The other patients and their relatives were friendly, but I didn't want to talk to them. I longed to see my own family members. I

often cried myself to sleep. I have no idea how many days passed, but it felt like forever. Then, one day I woke up, and Father was there. He said, "Sorry, my dear, I have been very busy. I can now stay with you. I won't leave you again."

I was so happy to see him. "Father, I missed you, Mother, and Brother a lot. Where are they?" I said.

His face changed and then he said, "They'll come in a few days. They are very busy these days. Be patient my dear."

Father and I stayed in that place for a long time, but Mother and Brother never came. I often asked Father to take me home, and he always gave the same reply: "Your jaw is broken. We must stay here until you are well. If we don't, you'll never open your mouth properly again. If you really want to go home, do what the nurses and I tell you to do. When your jaw has healed, I'll take you home."

The food, our companions, and the medical service were all good, but without Mother and Brother, I felt empty. I was never happy there.

Day by day, my jaw got better. One day, Father asked me to go out for a walk. On my first day outside, I was amazed by my surroundings. I had never seen such a beautiful place before. I asked Father, "Where are we? This isn't our County Town."

Father said, "This is Dar rtse mdo, the capital of our prefecture. First, we went to the County Town, but the doctor there said your jaw was very badly injured, and that he couldn't fix it, so they brought us here."

"When did you take me to the County Town doctor? I don't remember," I said.

"You were sleeping," Father said.

"Ye shes, your jaw has recovered. Where will we go now?" Father said.

"Of course, we will go home to meet Mother and Brother," I said.

We collected our things and prepared to leave the next day. One of my nurses gave me a gray bag and said something that I couldn't understand. Father said, "She said that she bought you some biscuits and drinks."

I was very happy to be going home. I said goodbye to the other patients and other companions. The beautiful doctor who had come in the van from our village helped us load our things into a truck. It was my first time in a truck, and I was excited to ride in such a big

vehicle. The driver, Father, and I were the only people in the truck. My jaw was still bandaged, but I could easily open my mouth. I ate all the biscuits and finished my drinks by the time darkness had fallen. Father and the driver talked in a language that I did not understand. Later, I fell asleep in Father's arms.

When I woke up, I was on Father's back. He had used his coat to wrap me very tightly. When I looked up, it was snowing.

He said, "Are you hungry?"

"No. Where are we?" I asked.

"We're on the way home. We will be there very soon," he said.

When he said home, I could not sleep. I was eager to meet Mother and Brother. When we reached our village, everything was completely different from what I remembered. Villagers were living in tents and busy rebuilding their houses.

We did not go directly home but, instead, went to Aunt's home. She and her husband were delighted to see us. But, rather than talking to them, I immediately ran off, heading for my home.

"Ye shes, wait! I'll go with you!" Father said, running after me. Several minutes later, when I arrived home, panting heavily, there was only a pile of rubble.

"Where is Mother?" I said, and cried loudly.

"Please calm down! Your mother is taking care of your brother. Let's go back to your aunt's home," he said sadly. Then he picked me up and carried me back to Aunt's house. When I saw Aunt's five-month-old daughter, I missed Brother very much. I often cried and asked Father to take me to Mother and Brother, but he didn't.

Father and I lived with Aunt until Father and Aunt had built a small house for us. While they were working, I took care of my infant niece.

I waited every day for Mother and Brother to return, but they didn't.

When we moved to our small house, Father removed the bandage from my jaw. It had healed, but a large, ugly scar remained.

My impoverished family had little furniture before the earthquake and now, after the earthquake, we had almost nothing. We slept on straw covered with goat skins and dirty blankets. We also had a battered pot, two bowls, and the bag the nurse had given me. That was about all we had.

I never gave up waiting for Mother and Brother and asked

Father every day, "When will they come home? I really miss them." Whenever I saw babies and other mothers, I wanted to cry. Every night I dreamed of meeting them.

Father always replied, "They will come soon."

I never saw Mother and Brother after the earthquake. I waited nearly four years. When Father went to work, I had to do the work at home. When I was eight years old, I finally understood what had happened to Mother and Brother. At last, Father said, "The earthquake killed your mother and brother. They were dead when I found them, crushed under a beam. When you were alone in the hospital, I was busy with their funerals. I took you to the County Town doctor, and he said your jaw was very seriously injured. I then entrusted you to a nurse and came back here to take care of their funerals."

"You weren't injured?" I asked.

"Two fingers on my right hand were injured, but it wasn't serious. Your aunt came and pulled away the debris that had trapped me. I fell under a table and that's what saved my life. When I got out, I saw one of your Mother's feet. Your aunt and I crazily pulled away the debris, but it was already too late. It was terrible. Your uncle took care of the corpses while I frantically searched for you. I thought if you had also died, I wouldn't want to live any longer. I considered suicide. Fortunately, you didn't leave me alone. This is the reality which we must deal with."

I was very sad and wept the entire night after he finished telling me what had happened. Father also wept.

That terrible earthquake had left me motherless. Unlike many other children, I didn't get to enjoy a mother's love. Whenever somebody talked about their brother, I often wept. I still miss them both very much, and on the sixth day of every New Year, I burn some food and butter lamps for them. I will never forget what happened on that horrible day.

...

We mix *rtsam pa* – barley flour – with candy, fruits, butter, uncooked rice, and uncooked noodles as an offering, which we then take to a monk, *bla ma*, or nun and ask them to chant scriptures over it to consecrate the mixture. Then we burn those offerings and light butter lamps for our deceased relatives, as a way of offering a New Year gift to them. After listening to Mother's story, I helped her light lamps and burn this *rtsam pa* for my grandmother and uncle every

New Year.

A mother is very important for a child. My mother lost her mother when she was four years old. For me, when Mother wasn't at home, I did not want to stay there. Mothers are just like our stove, providing warmth and food.

GRANDMOTHER

Mother continued her story...

Mother was gone. Grandmother (G.yang skyid (1900 - 1975) then became very important to me. Grandmother was blind and poor. She had become blind naturally in her old age. When she was young, she'd had good eyesight, but her vision had begun to dim when she was in her forties. By the time she was in her fifties, she was completely blind in both eyes. She was too poor to see a doctor.

Grandmother had two sons and a daughter. Her husband had died of an abdominal condition when her sons were very young, while she was pregnant with her daughter. Nonetheless, she became stronger after losing her husband, not weaker. She didn't remarry, though she faced many challenges to support her children.

Her eldest son - Uncle Tshe ring - was a monk whose tragic death I will retell here.

Pad+ma was Tshe ring's friend. He was also a monk, and he stole money from the monastery. When the abbot discovered somebody was stealing, he began searching for the thief. Pad+ma knew that if he was found out, the monastery would expel him and the other monks would curse him. He also knew that stealing monastery property was a serious evil. Even if people forgave him, he would also be punished after death.

Pad+ma observed that Uncle Tshe ring was quiet, often stayed in a room meditating, and that few people were close to him. Pad+ma thought that if he accused Tshe ring of stealing the money, he would be safe. He then went to the abbot and reported that he had seen Tshe ring stealing money from the monastery. He also made similar accusations to others in the monastery.

The abbot believed him, because he thought monks never lied. He summoned all the monks and *bla ma* to the central temple. Not knowing what was about to happen, Uncle Tshe ring also went. The other monks, the abbot, and *bla ma* looked at him strangely, but he

ignored them. That day, even his best friends ignored him.

The abbot started the meeting by saying, "Please confess. We know you stole from the monastery – you were seen. Just confess. We are like family members. We hope you'll stand up and confess."

Everyone pointed at Uncle Tshe ring and murmured. Uncle Tshe ring could only think how strange it all was. "I did nothing wrong," he thought to himself. "I have no reason to feel guilty."

The abbot leapt to his feet, enraged by Uncle Tshe ring's silence, and shouted, "How shameful! A monk! Stealing! What you stole belonged to our monastery. You must leave. Such an immoral monk cannot stay here with us. Buddha teaches us to be good and to pursue enlightenment, but what is your attitude? You don't know what rules a monk should follow. You don't even understand the basic knowledge a monk should possess. I'll count to five, and if you still haven't gotten to your feet, my fierce anger will make you sorry. One, two, three... four... five..." The abbot rushed at Uncle Tshe ring, grabbed him by the scruff of his robe, and said, "How can you be so shameless? Aren't you afraid to commit such a big sin? Why didn't you follow our rules?"

"Leave me alone! Why are you scolding me? What have I done wrong?" shouted Uncle Tshe ring. He was an honest, friendly monk. He was never impolite to his leaders but, at that moment, was so enraged that he could no longer control himself.

"You are the thief. You stole our monastery's money!" everyone shouted.

"Who is the witness? When the money was taken, I was with my friend the whole day. Ask him," said Uncle Tshe ring.

"I saw you stealing the money. Don't lie," said Pad+ma.

"How can you tell such lies?!" said Uncle Tshe ring. He stood and tried to leave, but some monks blocked his path.

"Pad+ma is a witness. Pad+ma, are you sure?" said the abbot.

"He did it. I would never lie," said Pad+ma.

Uncle Tshe ring quickly retorted, "Ask my friend, Bkra shis. Bkra shis, please tell them what we did that day."

"We were meditating the whole day," said Bkra shis.

No one believed them, because Pad+ma said he had seen Uncle Tshe ring. The abbot then angrily whipped Uncle Tshe ring in front of everyone at the meeting. Uncle Tshe ring then left the monastery and went to live in a cave where a *bla ma* had practiced meditation years before. However, Uncle Tshe ring fell ill, became

disabled, and died after a year of suffering at the age of twenty-five. Inexplicable illnesses can befall you if others curse you.

After Uncle Tshe ring died, the monastery realized he was innocent, because money continued to be stolen from the monastery. The abbot then expelled Pad+ma after he admitted to lying about Uncle Tshe ring. Everyone was very sorry for Uncle Tshe ring and gathered to chant for him.

Grandmother's second son, Rgyal mtshan, became a soldier when he was fifteen. After Liberation, he got a job in a herding area, where he married a nomad woman. Grandmother's youngest child was Mother. Grandmother lived alone, even after she had gone blind. My parents asked her to live with them, but she refused. Instead, she lived in a very old wood house that consisted of only a small bedroom and a kitchen. She kept everything very tidy and used a walking stick wherever she went.

She managed all the housework, including fetching water and cooking. When she got nice food, she put it in a small container with a lid and came to where I lived, which was quite far from her home. I was afraid that one day she would fall from the narrow bridge she had to cross to visit us.

It was hard for her when Mother was killed by the earthquake. Afterwards, she gathered her strength and focused all her love on me, her only grandchild.

I stayed with Grandmother from when I was thirteen, because Father needed to leave our village to find work, and I was afraid to live alone. Every day she cooked and never let me help her. Her noodles were especially tasty.

When I told her about my sadness she said, "My dear daughter – that's life. Whatever happens, we must adapt ourselves and deal with it. You are not the only one to have lost relatives. My husband left us when my children were very young, even before your mother was born. When my eldest son reached the age of twenty-five, he left me, and then the earthquake took my daughter and my grandson. I understand your feelings, but what can we do other than pray? One day we'll also meet death. Just be open-minded when you feel sad. I think I'll leave you soon, but never be sad about me because I'm old and useless now. Obey your father and be strong."

When I was sixteen, she really did leave. Father came home one night, so I went home. He had bought a big hunk of beef from the County Town, and we cooked it together. That night, we ate some of

the beef and saved the rest to share with others. Early the next morning, Father told me to take some to Grandmother. It was raining, so I put a big piece of plastic over my head. Father said, "Go quickly and tell Grandmother that I cooked this for her."

I happily ran straight to her home. When I arrived, the shabby door was locked from inside. It was about nine a.m. She always got up early and boiled bone tea.³ I looked at her chimney and saw there was no smoke.

I knocked and called to her from the window. It was very quiet inside. I looked for her nearby but I didn't find her. I asked her neighbor, Sgrol ma, whom I called White Haired Granny, if she had seen her.

She said, "I haven't seen her this morning. Is her door locked from the outside?"

"No, it's locked from the inside. I knocked and called, but nobody answered," I said and knocked again.

"I think something's wrong. She's never slept this late before," said White Haired Granny.

"Maybe because it's raining," I said.

"No, if she was inside, she would open the door," said White Haired Granny.

We tried to open her door and window, but they were too tightly fastened.

"Ye shes, go call Bstan pa," said White Haired Granny. Btsan pa was her husband.

I ran to his home and called, "Grandpa, please help me and White Haired Granny open my grandmother's door," and then I ran back.

Bstan pa soon came with a small hammer and said, "What's the problem?"

"We think something's wrong with G.yang skyid. She locked her door from the inside. We called but there was no answer," said White-Hair Granny.

³ After eating yak meat, the bones are hung above the stove where smoke and heat make them dry and brittle. The older and more brittle they are, the better the tea is. The bones are pulverized, added to a pot with a little black tea, and boiled for about fifteen minutes. Salt and a big spoon of *rtsam pa* are added when the mixture begins to give off the odor of cooking bones. The mixture is then boiled for about ten more minutes. Finally, more black tea is added to fill the pot.

Bstan pa used his hammer to pull a nail out of the clasp holding the lock, and then we went inside. The room was very neat and everything inside was perfectly clean. We went directly over to Grandmother's bed, where we found her lying peacefully, covered by a new blanket. Her face was turned to the window and her left hand was under her head. I opened my mouth to her, but Bstan pa stopped me. He went to her. White Haired Granny restrained me from going over to Grandmother. After a bit, he came back and gestured for us to go outside.

"Ye shes, is your Father at home?" Bstan pa asked.

"Yes, today he will repair our roof. Is Grandmother dead?" I asked, my eyes full of tears.

"Yes. Don't be sad. She died peacefully," Bstan pa said.

I cried sadly. White Haired Granny was also crying. She and Grandmother had been just like sisters. They helped each other and spent most of their time together. "Ye shes, don't cry. Go tell your father that your Grandmother has passed away. Sgrol ma, tell the villagers to come help. I'll be here waiting for you," said Bstan pa.

I realized I was still holding the beef. I was very sad. I left it with White Haired Granny and ran home.

Meanwhile, the rain had stopped and the sun was shining. Father was on the roof. I wanted to call him, but my heart wouldn't calm down.

"What's wrong with you? Did a stray dog chase you?" Father said, after he came down from the roof.

"No, Granny passed away," I said, and then embraced Father and cried loudly.

"What was wrong with her?" Father demanded.

"She died in bed. She was lying there peacefully, and her room was very clean. She was using her new blanket," I said.

"What should I do? Why does everyone I love leave me?" I said, hugging Father more tightly and crying.

"Please don't cry, I understand," said Father, gently wiping away my tears.

In Father's mind, I never grew up. He never scolded me or shouted at me. "Ye shes, lock our house. I'll ask your aunt to lend me her horse," said Father, and left for Aunt's home.

At that time, when we invited *bla ma* and monks to come chant for us, we had to take horses to fetch them, because we didn't have cars, tractors, or motorcycles.

"Ye shes, go to your grandmother's home. I'll go to the monastery and invite some *bla ma*. I also need to inform your Uncle, Rgyal mtshan," said Father.

"I'll come with you to help manage the horses," I said, because there were three horses, but only Father and my cousin.

"We can manage it. Just go," said Father, and galloped away.

I locked the door and went into Grandmother's home. When I got there, many people had already arrived. They were pitching a few tents, because Grandmother's house was too small to arrange a funeral.

I went in Grandmother's house again and looked at her face. It seemed she was sleeping. She was wearing her cleanest robe, and her hair was plaited into a nice braid. I wanted to call her, but I heard someone's footsteps. It was Father. "What are you doing there?" he asked.

"Oh, you're back. Where are the *bla ma*?" I said.

"They're already here," said Father.

"Father, why did Grandmother put on new clothes and use a new blanket?" I asked.

"Some people know when they will die. I guess she knew last night was her last, and that's why she washed and changed clothes," Father said.

"Did you inform Uncle Rgyal mtshan?" I asked.

"Yes," said Father.

Villagers, friends, and relatives automatically came to help, in keeping with the saying, "Don't go to celebrations without an invitation; go to funerals even if the deceased is your enemy."

Father and Cousin cleaned Grandmother's corpse. Uncle Rgyal mtshan would have been there, but it took him two days on horseback to arrive.

...

In our community, only men go to invite a *bla ma* from a monastery to come officiate at a funeral. The Buddha treats males and females equally, but people denigrate females, who they feel are too weak to make meaningful achievements in life, and who they consider spiritually impure because they give birth and menstruate. They seem to forget that their mothers are females. For these reasons, women cannot go to mountain deity altars and enter monasteries. If women do go, people curse them, which brings bad luck and makes them sick. That is how traditional Tibetans think.

For funerals, the deceased's family invites as many high-ranking *bla ma* as they can afford. The exact payment depends on the family's background. Wealthy families pay a lot and poor families pay as much as they can. *Bla ma* stay near the corpse and chant scriptures loudly to help comfort the deceased so that they will feel at ease in the afterlife as the lonely dead person goes to Heaven, which is another unfamiliar, strange world. The scriptures guide us to Heaven.

After the body dies, the soul lingers for forty-nine days. We consult a high-ranking *bla ma* about how long to keep the corpse, but we must keep it for at least three days. When somebody dies from natural causes, the *bla ma* advises keeping the corpse for at least three days, to wait for the soul to return to the corpse and avoid the deceased causing bad luck to the family and villagers. When someone is killed in a car crash, they are terribly frightened and the soul flees from the corpse. The *bla ma* knows this and advises the family to keep the corpse for a few more days, to wait for the soul's return. The *bla ma* also divines an auspicious date for the funeral.

When we know someone has died, we take a tea brick or a bowl of salt from our home to the home of the deceased in order to express sympathy. The deceased's family makes salted tea for everyone who attends the several days of the funeral.

People chant *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM* to pray and mourn for the death of the community member.

Only male relatives prepare the corpse by washing it, sprinkling flour on the hair to make it white, using butter to seal all the body's orifices, and then wrapping the entire body in a white cloth. The corpse is then kept in a separate room with many butter lamps. A man stays with the corpse at night to prevent cats from touching it because, if a cat touches a corpse, the deceased wakes up and anyone who meets it dies immediately. Grandfather told me this story:

A man vomited much blood before dying from cancer. Those who cleaned his corpse did not seal his nostrils well. His corpse was kept in the camp, but no one stayed with it. Blood flowed out from his nostrils, attracting a cat that licked it. The corpse suddenly woke up and went to the kitchen. People were so terrified that they ran away. In the end, however, everyone who had been in the camp died.

Many monks chant for the corpse for three or more days, and after the funeral, a monk stays in the home for forty-nine days, chanting and praying for the deceased.

Sky burial, water burial, earth burial, and cremation are all practiced in my home community. Sky burial involves a specialist chopping the corpse into pieces and feeding the flesh to vultures. He uses a very sharp knife to cut the flesh off the bones, and a hammer to pound the bones into small pieces on a flat stone, so the vultures will eat them.

The corpse is taken from the deceased's home after midnight to Gser rta Monastery.⁴ In the past, a corpse was transported on yaks or horses, which usually took about two days. When tractors became available, the trip was shortened to about ten hours. Currently, most people use cars or trucks, and the trip only requires about two hours. Nomads sometime use motorcycles to transport corpses, especially if the deceased is a child, because only about an hour is needed to travel to the monastery in this way.

The monastery is very large, and is nestled inside a valley. A stupa is located very near the sky burial place, which is just outside the valley. People carry the corpse around the stupa three times before the monk begins chopping it into pieces.

The monk looks after ten big vultures that only appear when he whistles to them. It seems the monk is able to speak to the vultures when he whistles to them like that.

Water burial takes place after midnight. The wrapped corpse is placed in a basket to transport it to the deepest part of the 'Bu chu, a big river that runs between Brag 'go County Town and Brag 'go Monastery. From my village, it takes about one hour to reach the 'Bu chu on foot. We think fish eat the corpse, but nobody ever actually sees this because the fast-flowing river carries it away.

For earth burial, a wooden coffin is prepared, and then the shrouded corpse is placed inside. A day before the funeral, a grave is dug for the coffin. A few years after the burial, some rich families dig the coffin up. At that time, only the skeleton remains in the coffin. They invite monks to burn the bones and then pour the ash in a holy place. This is done because, as long as the coffin is in the ground, the deceased's family needs to re-build the grave mound before every

⁴ In Gser rta County, Dkar mdzes Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province.

New Year. As time passes, later generations become careless with their ancestors' graves. When we dug up Mother's grandmother's grave, the coffin had only her skeleton, and her pair of silver earrings.

Cremation is carried out just after daybreak. The corpse is placed on a simple bed, which is atop a pile of wood, straw, and dry bushes. A little gasoline is poured on the wood and the pile is set alight, while monks chant scriptures. The resulting ash is collected and poured into a river.

Taboos involving death and death rituals include:

- Females should avoid touching a corpse.
- Each person has a bowl used for tea and eating. The deceased's bowl is turned upside down on a table in the shrine room where butter lamps are lit.
- The deceased's relatives do not wash their face, hair, or clothes for forty-nine days. They may only wash their hands and brush their teeth.
- Relatives must not sing, dance, or play music for three years.
- Relatives must not slaughter an animal for three years, but they may buy meat from the County Town shops.
- Funeral assistants should not wear good clothes or make-up.
- Funeral assistants must not sing, dance, or laugh at a funeral.
- The house of the deceased should not be decorated or painted for three years.
- The deceased person's name should never be mentioned again. If the name is mentioned accidentally, *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM* should be repeated immediately to atone for the mistake.

A STEPMOTHER

I felt miserable without Mother or Grandmother to teach me how to farm. Women are expected to weed, cut grass from the edges of fields, and irrigate. Irrigation was especially difficult in the winter when the ditch would fill with ice. We then had to burn straw and dried yak dung to melt the ice or we smashed it with a hammer. We only irrigated barley fields. Crops were rotated on a yearly basis, otherwise the yields were low.

When I was a child, Father combed my hair and helped me dress for such special days as New Year, weddings, and picnics. When Father was very busy, there were many lice in my hair and clothes, which Grandmother couldn't see. My playmates teased me by saying that I resembled a lice-covered pig. Such taunts caused me to cry when I was alone. I missed Mother and Brother, but never told Father and Grandmother, because I knew they missed them as much as I did. After Grandmother died, I felt lonelier than before and I sobbed when I saw Grandmother's old friend.

Father taught me how to do various tasks and when I couldn't manage some aspect of farm work, he came and helped me. People teased and gossiped about him doing farm work, which was considered women's work. Sometimes he asked Aunt to help me and to teach me. We did her farm work first, and then started to do mine. Sometimes, it was time for harvest, and we couldn't finish our farm work as we wanted to. I disliked that, even though she was my real aunt.

Father pretended to be strong, but I knew he was lonelier than me. He began to drink. After I went to bed, he would start drinking and smoking. I then often saw him alone in his bed with a bottle of barley liquor and a pack of cigarettes. I considered getting up and chatting with him, but then I thought he probably wanted to be alone. I hoped Father would find a woman who loved him and who could share his sadness and happiness.

One afternoon, I returned from farming and saw Father singing and dancing alone. I wondered why he was so happy. I went

in and saw he was wearing his old, high-heeled boots. The earth floor had been thoroughly softened by his dancing.

"Father, why are you so happy today?" I asked.

"My dear, you've finally come back. I was waiting for you. See – I've cooked your favorite potato dish," he said, smiling.

I went to the stove and saw that he had cooked enough potatoes to feed ten people.

"This is a lot for just the two of us," I said.

"Not just the two of us – your mother and brother will return soon," he said, and continued singing and dancing.

I was shocked, thinking he had gone mad.

"Father, don't frighten me! Mother and Brother will never return. They're dead!" I said with a loud cry.

He then fell silent, squatted on the ground, and wept pitifully.

"My Buddha, why do you treat me so cruelly? What did I do wrong? Why did you take my wife and son?" he shouted in anguish. His tears and snot-covered mouth and nose made me feel very sympathetic, but I was also terrified.

I stood by him, not knowing whether to comfort him or let him cry. I thought that maybe crying was good for him, and that after he had wept for some time, he would feel more comfortable.

He cried and shouted for a long time. I just stood there, quietly weeping, until he rolled himself up on the floor and went to sleep.

I wanted to take him to his bed, but he was too heavy for me to carry. I ran to Aunt's home, though I was very afraid of the dark. It was late, and the village was quiet. Only barking dogs broke the inky silence.

I reached Aunt's gate, shaking like a leaf in the wind. I felt like every dark shadow was a ghost. Even my own shadow scared me. Through there was no light in her home, I knocked on the door.

"Aunt, please open the door!" I shouted in terror, believing the ghosts heard and would soon come to get me.

I knocked and knocked. No one answered. I threw pebbles on the roof. Finally, a light came on. "Who's there?" asked Uncle Kun dga', emerging with a dim torch.

"It's Ye shes. Please come and help me put Father in bed. He's sick," I sobbed.

"Ye shes, don't cry. I'll come. Just give me a bit of time so I can put on my clothes," said Uncle Kun dga'. He soon returned with

Aunt.

"Ye shes, what's wrong with your father? I saw him washing potatoes by the river this afternoon. He seemed fine," said Aunt.

I explained what had happened. When we got to my home, Father was deep asleep and snoring loudly.

"Don't worry, he's fine now," said Uncle Kun dga', and together we got him into bed.

Uncle Kun dga' and Aunt were shocked by what Father had done. They helped me pour water on the softened floor to fix the damage Father's dancing had done. I also gave them a big basin full of cooked potatoes, because it was too much for my father and me to finish.

"Ye shes, don't be afraid. Your aunt will sleep with you tonight," said Uncle Kun dga'.

"It's OK. I'm not afraid now. I can sleep alone," I said very respectfully. Aunt had a two-month old daughter in her home and I thought her baby needed her more than I did.

After Uncle Kun dga and Aunt left, I stayed awake for a long time, thinking about what Father had done. I really wanted him to marry someone who would love and care for him. As his daughter I could care for him, but he needed a wife who could comfort him. I also worried that he would continue his mad behavior the next day. It was daybreak when I finally drifted off to sleep.

I dreamed and didn't wake up in time to drive our yak to the river, where a herdsman then drove all the villagers' yaks, cows, and horses to the mountains. We only had one yak. Yaks are used for plowing, cows are milked, and horses are used for transportation. Rich families own more than ten head of livestock while poor families have not even one.

Villagers often take turns herding livestock, but sometimes they hire someone to herd collectively for ten *yuan* plus one medium-sized basin of barley per each head of livestock per year. No herdsman is needed in winter because, after harvest in August, there are no crops for them to damage after harvest in August.

I dreamed I was in an agricultural area with many colorful flowers. The sun was shining and clumps of clouds drifted in the endless blue sky. I felt energetic and carefree. I was dancing and singing. Suddenly, Father, Grandmother, and Mother emerged from the dense flowers. Mother was holding Brother in her arms. All of them had delighted, smiling faces. Grandmother was free of her

walking stick, and it seemed she could see very well. I joyously hugged each of them in turn. Brother was wearing the yellow shoes that Mother had knitted for me when I was a baby. I took him from Mother and kissed his soft cheeks, and he laughed sweetly. Father had brought delicious foods such as rice, fried potatoes, and apples. We were very happy to be together in such wonderful weather for a picnic. Mother combed and deloused my hair as I ate a big red apple. I felt complete, lying with my head on her lap.

"Mother, don't leave Father and me alone. We miss you, Grandmother, and Brother so much," I said.

"I will never leave you. We'll be together forever," said Mother. Gradually, in this wonderful dream, I fell asleep with my head on her lap. When I woke up, I was lying alone on bare ground. The colorful flowers and clouds had all vanished.

I crazily shouted, "Mother! Brother! Grandmother! Don't leave us again!" as hot tears flowed down my cheeks, wetting my pillow and awakening me.

"Dear, did you dream about your mother, brother, and grandmother?" asked Father, sitting near me with swollen red eyes. "Sorry! Everything was my mistake, I am a useless husband and father," Father said as he began weeping.

I thought I should control myself and make Father happy. I knew that I was the only hope for him to live, and as a daughter, I had a responsibility to care for Father.

"Father, please don't cry. You are a great father, and you were a wonderful husband. It wasn't your mistake. They only had that much time to live. We should face reality and enjoy our lives. Even if we cry every day and feel bad, they will never return," I said to comfort him. At that time, Mother and Brother had been dead for more than eight years. The two of us were still living in the past.

"Control your feelings. You have me – you are not alone," I said, using my sleeves to wipe away his tears and snot. "Father, promise me that you will never do such silly things again. You must stop drinking and smoking. I'm sure you can," I said.

"OK, I swear to you that I'll never do such things again to make my daughter sad. I'll give my daughter a happy life," he said earnestly, his right hand touching his hair, which is what locals do when they make a very serious oath.

"Thanks Father," I said, and went to the window and watched the sun rise over a mountain peak.

"Oh, goodness, today I slept late. I'll cook for us now," I said.

"I already made something. I got up before daybreak. You started crying in your sleep, so I sat here until you woke up. I didn't wake you because I thought you would be scared," said Father.

I didn't leave Father throughout the whole day. I thought it would be dangerous if I was not there. I intended to talk with him, though I felt a bit guilty, because I wanted to ask him to remarry.

I made a fire and baked potatoes while Father repaired the floor. After breakfast, I said. "Let's stay at home today and have a talk."

"Darling, I know I made a big mistake. Anything you want me to do, I'll agree to. Just tell me," Father said.

"Whatever you have done is in the past, from today on, we will no longer live in the past, nor will we worry about the future. Let's live in the present and find joy in our lives," I said like an adult.

"I give you one hundred points for what you just said," Father said jokingly.

"I want you to remarry. I know you didn't remarry because of me. I'm grateful for that, but I want you to be happy. Let's build a new family and a new life. I am no longer a child, and you don't need to worry about me," I said confidently.

"Why should I remarry? I have my home and I have a lovely daughter. There's no reason for an outsider to come into our home. Maybe you don't understand that if I remarry, we'll have children, and then you'll suffer. And most of the time I must be away from home to earn money. If your stepmother mistreated you when I'm away, I wouldn't be able to help you. You see how happy we are now? I have promised you I won't make you sad again," said Father.

"I meant that I hoped you would marry whenever you liked and not waste your life out of concern for me," I said with a big smile.

"I understand what you're thinking. When I'm ready to remarry, I'll inform you," he said jokingly.

That was the first time I spoke like a friend to Father. We stayed at home the whole day, but I felt the day was very short.

We must face many difficulties throughout our lives because that is what life is really supposed to be. We should never fear difficulties. If we do not try to overcome them, we will never know the results of our efforts. Maybe the outcome is a failure, but the path to success surely involves many failures.

My wish came true – father found a lover named Phun

'tshogs. She had a husband, three daughters, and two sons. Her family was peaceful and harmonious. Her husband, Ya ma, had been a monk, and then forced to become a layman. Nonetheless, local people still invited him to chant scriptures during funerals and to cure illness. He was respected by everyone in the community. It was more convenient to invite him than *bla ma*, because inviting a *bla ma* from a monastery required riding a horse a half-hour to the monastery and, after the ritual, escorting the invited *bla ma* back to the monastery.

Ya ma wore ordinary clothes and children called him 'Uncle Bla ma', which signified that they respected him as much as a *bla ma*. He knew that his wife and Father had a relationship, but he was very generous and friendly. He said nothing critical about their relationship and was Father's good friend. Before they were neither friends nor relatives but, because of sharing the same woman, they became as close as brothers. Many were shocked by their relationship. Some said that their woman must have been overly lustful to have two men at the same time. However, she was very nice, hard-working, patient, and friendly. She cared for me more than her own children and ordered her children to be kind to me. Her children treated me as their real sister. I had a very enjoyable time with them.

Phun 'tshogs started to teach me how to do farm work and helped me do it. She also asked her friends and daughters to help me. Women spent much of the summer weeding and doing other field work from daybreak to dusk, except for a break at lunchtime. It seemed we were competing to be the first to finish but, actually, we never finished until autumn.

Phun 'tshogs' encouraged me to be independent and supported me in whatever I did. I shared my difficulties with her. She replaced my real mother. Whatever she bought for her own children, she also bought for me. When she cooked nice food, she told one of her children to bring some to me.

After a year, Phun 'tshogs gave birth to a girl named G.yang 'dzoms. I was very glad to have a sister and wished that she could live with us. However, Phun 'tshogs didn't agree, arguing that an infant needed her mother. I was an adult by that time and could have cared for my sister. Her other sisters and brothers loved her as much as I did. She was very cute and beautiful, but suffered from an illness. We worried she would leave us. Fortunately, she didn't die, but she remained weak.

Gradually, G.yang 'dzoms grew up and, like her other siblings, she called Ya ma 'Father' and called my father 'Uncle'. She didn't know who her real father was and neither did we.

Father loved G.yang 'dzoms, though he never knew if he was her father. I hoped that in time she would come to care for Father, and then I could be a nun. Father, however, never agreed. He said I was his heart.

After G.yang 'dzoms turned one, Phun 'tshogs and Father's relationship started to fall apart. Phun 'tshogs stopped visiting and caring for us as much as she used to. Maybe she felt that they could live apart without frequent contact, and maybe she also realized that she and Father would never be able to live together. She could only live with two husbands in one home if the husbands were brothers. Father did not object to ending his romance with Phun 'tshogs, as it was clear that he would never be able to marry another man's wife officially.

Many of my hopes did not come true. Every time we get something, we lose something, so it's better to cherish and be satisfied with what we have. Too much desire pushes you into a fire. When facing difficulties, never think that it is a very big concern. We are made for challenges that make us struggle. Life is a long journey with new circumstances and there is no need to fear tomorrow. We should be happy because this is the way of life.

I was a sixteen year old who could farm competently. In 1984, Father left home to work in a nearby hydro-electric power plant. In the hot summer, he worked as a gatekeeper and in the winter, when the water in the dam froze, he smashed the ice with a hammer or made a fire to thaw it. When the water froze, there was no light for us. One of his friends who worked there had introduced Father to the job. Father earned about one hundred RMB a month in summer, and in winter, because the work was harder, he got paid 150RMB a month. Even though the power plant was only a ninety minute walk from our village, Father did not return home except during the New Year period and for fifteen days in autumn. However, I often visited him at his work place.



Mother and Grandfather (August 2011, Tshes bcu lha mo).

MARRIAGE

I was eighteen when I had my first boyfriend, Bsam 'grub. He was the eldest of four brothers and two sisters. We were from the same village, and were both the same age. He worked with his father, who was a blacksmith, in Brag 'go County Town. His family was the happiest family in my village, because his father earned good money. Other villagers admired the good food they ate and also the fact that they were a harmonious family. We played together when we were children. I hated him then because he often teased girls but, when he grew up, he was handsome, hardworking, and kind.

One day, he and two friends killed two birds with stones, and then roasted the birds by the roadside with a fire they made from branches. When my friends and I passed by, they asked us to join them. We did. The birds were very small and, after dividing them into five pieces, each of us had only a little to eat. Though we had no salt or other seasoning, that meat was the most delicious food I've ever tasted in my life. We put the small pieces of meat in our mouths and sucked and chewed on it like gum. I chewed on mine until I got home. We rarely had nice food at that time, which is another reason it tasted so good.

We rapidly grew up and I fell in love with Bsam 'grub. I worried that one day I would lose him. He was the eldest child, and was therefore culturally required to stay at home, marry, and bring in a wife into his home to care for his parents and younger siblings. In contrast, I was an only child and if I married out, no one would care for Father.

Bsam 'grub knew that because of this situation, his family didn't like me, which made him sad. This, in turn made me sad, too. I decided to let him go, but then I got pregnant. I didn't tell him, because I knew this would put him under more pressure. I also thought that when he eventually knew, he would probably leave me and the baby.

He started smoking. When he visited me, he didn't have much to say, he just thoughtfully smoked.

Very late one night, he came to my home. I smelled liquor, which was unusually strong. His face was very red. I asked him why he had drunk so much. He said nothing and slept. A bit later, he vomited on the floor. I was worried, washed his face and hands, and forced him to swallow a spoon of vinegar. I knew he was suffering because his family would not allow him to marry me.

I took off his shoes and put him in bed. The spoonful of vinegar helped him sleep well. My heart ached so badly that I could not go to sleep. At two in the morning, I sat sobbing in the corner of our small, grungy kitchen. Bsam 'grub still didn't know I was pregnant, and I felt like it was the end of the world. I didn't know if he should leave me and stay with his family, or cut ties with them and stay with me. I knew I had to tell him I was pregnant, but I feared it would further upset him.

I didn't sleep the entire night. Bsam 'grub usually got up at six and then went to work, and so when six o'clock came, I woke him. He said, "I don't want to go to work."

Father didn't know I was pregnant. He was very fond of Bsam 'grub and supported me in whatever I wanted to do. Father was sleeping in another small room. I woke him up and told him my problems. Normally, it is unthinkable for a daughter to discuss her pregnancy with her father, but I had no one else to tell. Father then said I should marry Bsam 'grub, no matter what his family said.

At that time, locals did not care if two people loved each other and had a relationship, so long as they were going to marry later. Most marriages were arranged and there were many challenges and difficulties in such marriages. Nearly all of those who were forced into such marriages yearned for a happier life, which they felt involved true love. Thus, marrying your true love was considered an ideal situation. I almost had to give up on love but, luckily, my pregnancy attached him to me. If I had not been pregnant, I would have let him go because I didn't want to subject him to pain and heavy pressure. I want to thank my dear daughter because her arrival created a wonderful life for me.

One morning, I summoned the courage to tell Bsam 'grub about my pregnancy. He then became more determined to marry me. He said nothing, but went to his home. When he returned late in the afternoon he was very drunk.

I asked, "Why did you drink so much?"

He said, "I won't return home. I told my parents that I would

marry you, regardless of their opinion. I am responsible for our baby."

I knew he had quarreled with his family.

Father saw us talking, approached, and said, "I should talk to your parents and ask them to agree to your marriage." He then went to Bsam 'grub's home. At nine p.m. he returned and said, "I don't know what's wrong with your parents. I talked to them very politely, but they refused to listen. They said, 'Take our boy to your home, but we won't give him anything. He is no longer our son.' Regardless of that, I am very glad that you will marry my daughter."

Afterwards, Bsam 'grub didn't return to his home, and no one from his home visited him. When his brothers and sisters saw me, they scolded, "Shameless bitch! Give us our brother back!" They even said such things in public.

Although I was enraged, I said nothing because I didn't want to cause more trouble for my husband. Others told me that his mother had once furiously cursed, "I hope that bitch and her baby both die!" It seemed everything was my fault. I was really afraid of her curse and worried that the baby would die.

When Bsam 'grub came to live with me, I had been pregnant for five months. Villagers gossiped because they could see my protruding belly, though I tried to hide it by wearing a large black coat. I worried whenever I went to fetch water. However, after Bsam 'grub came, I no longer cared what others said. Though people usually think negatively of girls who become pregnant before marriage, when we began to live together, the rumors evaporated. However, his family continued to make trouble for us.

Regardless of a family's background, at the very least all close relatives should gather for a party when a couple marries. I was an only child, and we should have had a wedding ceremony. However, Bsam 'grub's family opposed this, so we didn't have one.

Father said, "It doesn't matter that Bsam 'grub's family hasn't provided you and Bsam 'grub with any property. My family is poor, but I won't let my son-in-law go hungry and cold. I'm furious with Bsam 'grub's family's attitude, and their silly behavior. In their mind, my daughter is a bitch. They wrongly refuse to understand reality."

We had no contact with his family for five months. I was pregnant for ten months, which worried me a lot, because most babies are delivered within nine months. My baby was large and fat at delivery. Bsam 'grub's mother did not come to assist when I gave

birth. Instead, Father asked help from a neighbor, Lha skyid. She was very kind, and without her help, I think I would have died owing to the baby's size. Delivery was painful and took a long time.

Bsam 'grub's parents were very angry but, when they knew that our baby was born, they were no longer able to stay away. One morning, when I was collecting yak dung in the stable, somebody called my name. I opened the door, and Bsam 'grub's parents were standing there, looking guilty. I politely greeted them. When they saw their first grandchild, they forgave Bsam 'grub and me.



My parents standing in our yard (August 2011, Tshes bcu lha mo).

PART TWO

ME

Lha mo (b. 1988)

A LATE ARRIVAL

I was a ten-month baby born in a shabby wooden room on a goat skin on a barley straw bed. Mother said her belly was huge with me and, without leaning against something, she couldn't sit or stand easily. She said she almost died from pain during my delivery. An older neighbor helped Mother during the delivery and commented that she had never seen such a large newborn.

When I was a month old, Mother took me to a high-ranking *bla ma* in Brag 'go Monastery, which is an hour's walk from our village. The *bla ma* gave me the name Tshes bcu lha mo. 'Tshes bcu' means the tenth day of any month and Lha mo means 'goddess.' My English name – Emily – was given by Teacher Kevin when I was eighteen years old. Currently, I use Emily because I am now living in the USA and Emily is easier for my classmates to pronounce. Many people also call me Lha mo.

Tibetans generally feed babies *rtsam pa* prepared with fresh yak butter. They melt the butter, add *rtsam pa*, and then mix it. This mixture is kept in a bowl and a little is fed to the baby each time it is hungry. The feeder first chews the *rtsam pa*, moistening it, and then moves it from their mouth into the baby's mouth. Mother told me, for example, that she fed me in this way from the time I was a month old until I was about eighteen months old. The mother also breastfeeds the baby. However, I was spoiled by Grandfather, who fed me shop-bought instant noodles. Once I had tasted them, I no longer was interested in eating *rtsam pa*. My family thought the noodles were healthier than *rtsam pa* but, of course, the opposite is true.

When I was three, Grandfather made a wooden car with four metal wheels that was big enough for me to ride in. He pushed it as I rode and steered. He dressed me in a boy's robe and tied a small silver knife to my sash. He put small pieces of paper in the sheath so the knife was tightly jammed inside, and told me to never take the knife out. My hair was short like a boy's. People outside my village thought I was a boy when they first saw me. Grandfather called me 'Bu', which means 'Boy'. When village children wanted to hold me, he

refused because he was afraid I would be hurt. He never let me out of his sight.

Grandfather had a drawer that he kept locked. The key was always with him. Whenever I wanted to eat something, he would say, "I have magic!" shake his hands, put them behind him, and tell me to choose one. He would then give me a snack that I really loved. He often said, "My dear Bu, whenever you are hungry or want some sweets, just come to me. I'll use my magic and give you some. But you must be the great Bu."

I truly believed he had magic that could produce sweets and whenever I was hungry, I told him. He was like an assistant who served me.

One afternoon, I took a short nap. I was very hungry when I woke up. I ran to Grandfather, and asked for his magic. He said, "My dear Bu, today my magic machine is broken, but I'll make some sweet *rtsam pa* for you."

I really hated *rtsam pa* and said, "No. I need your magic. I want candy. If you won't give me candy, I won't eat anything the whole day." I then sadly went back to bed. Though I was hungry, I soon fell asleep. When I woke up, my parents were back from work and cooking dinner. No one came to comfort me.

I was waiting for somebody to call me to eat, but nobody did. I was hungry. The delicious odors wafting from the kitchen made me even hungrier. I thought maybe they had forgotten me. I went to the kitchen very angrily, and Father said, "My darling, I thought you were still out with your friends. What were you doing in your room?"

"I was sleeping and none of you came to call me. I'm hungry," I said, tears streaming down my cheeks.

"Oh, darling, what's wrong?" asked Mother, and came to hug me.

"Grandfather didn't give me candy. He said his magic was not working. I was hungry the whole day," I said emotionally, and began sobbing.

"Bu, you know what? If children cry at night, an owl will come and take them to the forest," said Grandfather.

"You mean that big bird that watches crying children at night?" asked Father.

"Oh, yeah, I heard that our neighbor's child, Lha lha, was crying last night and a big owl came and carried her out the window. I think it has already eaten Lha lha. I am really scared to cry at nights,"

said Mother, wiping away my tears with her robe edge.

"I don't think the owl will come. My friends said the owls only take bad people at night, and you know I'm not a bad girl. If an owl wants to take someone it should be Grandfather, because he is a bad person. He told me that whenever I wanted candy he would ask his magic machine for it, but today he lied," I said, and went to Father, who was sitting in corner of the kitchen. Actually, I was very scared of the owl.

"Yeah, I'm a bad person, so I'm going to go live with the owl. I don't think you need me anymore," said Grandfather and left the kitchen.

I thought he was really leaving and cried very loudly, "Don't go! You aren't bad! Please come back!"

"Don't cry. He won't leave you. He is going to pee," said Father, wiping away my tears with his hand. After a few minutes, Grandfather returned from outside, holding a packet of cookies. He gave them to me and said, "See! The machine is working again, but I don't think it will work every time."

"See, you lied to me. I didn't think your machine was broken, you just didn't want to give me anything," I said and returned the cookies to him.

"Are you sure you aren't going to eat them?" asked Grandfather.

"Yeah, now I have my parents with me. They love me and won't let me starve," I replied proudly.

Then I noticed Mother was cooking noodles with vegetables, which I didn't like.

"Mother, what are you cooking? You know I don't like those noodles. I think you don't love me anymore," I shouted.

"What a bad girl! How dare you shout at your mother? I thought you were a good girl, but you aren't," Grandfather said.

"This is your fault, Father. You never let us beat her when she is wrong and now she is hopelessly spoiled," Mother said.

"Do you know why we cook tasteless noodles? We have Chinese bread for you," Father said, and passed me the bread. Chinese bread is one of my favorite foods. It came from a Chinese restaurant, was baked in a circular pot, and had a very nice smell.

It was expensive and my family bought it only for me. Sometimes Mother tried to bake bread for me, but the taste was different from the restaurant bread. Besides, Mother cooked with our

local wheat flour, not the white Chinese flour. Even so, I thought Mother's bread was much better than *rtsam pa*. Because I was the first child, my family tried hard to provide my favorite foods, though we didn't have much money.

"Wow, how come? Am I dreaming? I missed my lovely bread!" I exclaimed, delighted to have it for dinner. My mood suddenly rose as I forgot all my unhappiness.

"Today, your grandfather didn't have candy for you, so we bought you bread to apologize. I think you like this bread. If you don't, you don't have to eat it," Mother teased.

They ate their noodles, and I had my bread. I liked to eat with Grandfather because he gave me the food I loved. "Bu! Here is your favorite food, come!" said Grandfather. He had not eaten the meat in his portion and gave it to me. I ate it and then gave Mother his bowl to refill.

"Father, eat yours, I'll give her more if she wants more," said Mother, passing the bowl to him.

"No, I want to give my best food to my Bu. She's everything to me. I want her to grow up soon and go to school," said Grandfather, patting my head.

"Mother, don't be jealous of me. You're an old woman now, though you are Grandfather's daughter. When I grow up I'll reward him," I teased. That was a great night.

YAK ATTACK

My brother, Blo bzang, was born in 1992. Our parents and other relatives were delighted with his arrival. Having both a son and daughter was seen as very auspicious.

Grandfather was at the monastery attending ceremonies.

"Lha mo, go see if the newborn kid is with its mother," Father said, as I was playing with water in a basin. I didn't want to go, and so I pretended not to hear him.

"Lha mo! Please help me and go check. I'll give you some candy as a reward," Father said.

"OK. You are so bad! You always order me to do something when I'm busy, but if you are going to give me some candy, I'll do it," I replied.

Our stable adjoined our kitchen, which was both a bedroom and where we cooked and ate. My parents and brothers slept there. There was another bedroom for Grandfather and me. I ran to the stable where the goats were kept. We had five goats and two of them had new kids. I saw a small kid lying in a corner. It was dark in the stable, and I had to go closer to make sure that it was the newborn kid. Its mother was eating straw. As soon as I made sure that it was the newborn kid, I turned and ran back towards the kitchen. Our yak came in through the yard gate at that moment, and was startled. It charged straight at me, picked me up on its horns, and shook me from side to side. Hanging upside down in the air from the yak's horns, being shaken to and fro, I was terrified, and almost fainted. I wanted to shout but I was too afraid to utter a sound. After shaking me for some time, the yak tossed me. I hit the stable's wooden gate and bounced back to the yak's horns. Father heard me whimpering and came outside. He shouted at the yak, and it tossed me to the ground. I was like a lamb attacked by a wolf. I was so terrified that I couldn't cry. Father ran to me and held me in his arms.

"Bu! Are you all right?" Father asked, and brought me into the kitchen.

"Oh, my Buddha! What happened?" Mother exclaimed when

she saw my torn clothes.

"The yak attacked her. Give her some water, and I'll go beat that awful yak. How dare it attack my daughter!" Father shouted, and ran outside.

I heard him beating the yak and yelling, "Bitch! You want to kill my daughter! If anything is wrong with my daughter, I'll kill you!"

Mother held me in her arms for a minute, and then went to the stable to check on Father. He had closed the gate so the yak couldn't escape, and was beating it with a thick stick.

"Please don't beat the yak so mercilessly. You know it's old now. It's a living being. It doesn't think like people," Mother implored.

"See its sharp horns? They could have killed our daughter," Father said, and continued beating it.

When I heard that I might have died, I recovered enough to cry.

"Bu, are you hurt?" Father said, throwing away the stick and running to me.

"I don't want to die. I'm very scared," I whimpered, hugging Mother's neck.

"You are not going to die. You aren't hurt," Mother comforted.

Father took me into the kitchen and said, "Burn some juniper for her."

Mother put a small piece of cloth from the robe of a high-ranking *bla ma*⁵ and some juniper on some smoldering yak dung. I opened my mouth to allow the smoke to enter my mouth and nose. Mother ensured the smoke also penetrated my clothes.

I was trembling. "Are you cold, my dear? Your face is very hot and red," Father said, and carried me to bed.

I couldn't reply. I put my head on the pillow and screamed, thinking that this would make me feel better. Instead, it drove my parents crazy. They ran to me, hugged me, and said, "Are you all right? Are you hurt? Is somewhere painful?" Mother brought water for me.

"I'm going to kill that bitch yak. I can't bear it," Father yelled again and ran to the stable.

⁵ Such cloth is believed to be helpful in treating injuries and illness. Juniper obtained from *bla ma*, monasteries, and nunneries is also believed to be efficacious because it has been blessed.

Mother stopped him by saying, "Yaks don't know anything. It's a living being, but not human like us. If you kill it, our family will suffer. It never hurt anybody else. Can you plow the field without a yak?"

"Please don't kill the yak. I'm fine," I said.

"Then what was wrong with you? Why did you scream?" Father said.

"The yak turned me upside down. I was terrified. I thought I was going to die," I said.

"What did you do to the yak? Did you prevent it from eating straw?" Mother asked.

"No. I was running back here when the yak came through the gate. I guess I must have startled her," I said.

"Let me check you for injuries. Maybe you don't feel pain now," Father said, rolling up my sleeves.

I lay down on the bed and they checked me from head to foot. My head and knees hurt when Father touched them.

"Those are just small problems. If your face or head had hit the door, it would have been very serious," Father explained.

Again and again that night, I recalled the yak attacking me. I screamed again, shocking my parents.

"What's wrong my dear? Did you have a nightmare?" Mother asked.

"The yak, the yak..." I muttered.

"I think the yak really scared her. Tomorrow we should take her to a *bla ma*," Father said.

At five in the morning, the three of us sat in bed and talked till eight. Next, we walked to the County Town to consult a well-known *bla ma*. Those who had experienced bad luck and sickness often went to see him. He was very old. "My poor girl, I understand how frightening a yak attack is. When I was ten, my family was in a herding area. A yak attacked me and I almost died. It gored me in the belly with both horns. There was no hospital and no doctor. My parents wrapped a cloth around the wound. Fifteen days later, I was cured. Maybe I recovered so easily because my young body was strong. If this happens to people now, they take the person to hospital and the treatment is at least a month," the *bla ma* said, patting my head.

"Did you cry?" I asked.

"Yeah, a lot. I was alone in the mountains. I knew no one

would come to help me for hours. I returned home alone. What a miserable day!" the *bla ma* said, shaking his head.

"You were a very strong boy," I said.

He took his string of beads from around his neck, held it in both hands, and closed his eyes.

"Are you going to sleep?" I said.

"Don't talk," Mother whispered.

He opened his eyes after a minute or so and said, "OK, there is nothing to worry about. She'll be fine soon. Just give some money to the monastery and let them chant some scriptures for her. Is she naughty?" the *bla ma* asked.

"She is very naughty. She is our first child and my father spoils her," Mother said.

"I don't think I'm naughty. Father orders me to do things, even though I'm too young to do such things. He's lazy," I said cheekily.

"Ha-ha, you are my daughter. I should tell you to do things," Father said.

"It is OK to be naughty, because naughtiness means cleverness. But, you should help your parents, especially when they become old," the *bla ma* said, and laughed. Then he poured a little consecrated water into my cupped palm. I sipped it. It tasted very good.

"Uncle, give me more. This is delicious," I said.

"Dear, this is very special water. You can't buy it in the Chinese market," Mother said, and pulled me to her side.

"That's interesting. But I think Uncle Bla ma can give me more," I said.

"OK, if you like, I'll give you more, and then it will cure your naughtiness," the *bla ma* said, and passed the bottle to me.

"Don't be so naughty or I'll beat you," Father scolded.

"No, no, she is too young," the *bla ma* said, handing me some candy.

We said goodbye, went to the monastery, and gave some money to the monks so they would chant scriptures for me. My parents also bought me the bread I liked most. I had no more nightmares after that.

I never went near a yak again. Most people are afraid of dogs, but I was scared of yaks. If a yak was near the gate, I called my parents or Grandfather to come protect me.



Me and my brother, Blo bzang, in 1995, Brag 'go County Town (commercial photographer).

SLAUGHTERING PIGS

Before Tibetan New Year, local Tibetan farmers slaughter pigs while herders slaughter yaks. If a family is rich, they slaughter at least one, though sometimes more, but poorer families cannot afford to slaughter any of their animals. Feeding an ever-hungry pig for at least a year is a lot of work.

"I think you should ask your brother to accompany you tomorrow, and then you can help him slaughter his pig," Mother said.

"I know, I already told him, but I don't know if he is free tomorrow. Anyway, our pig isn't that big. I can do it by myself," Father said.

Every day Grandfather, Brother, and I stayed at home. Feeding the pig was my job. Brother and I played with the pig, which was the first white pig my family slaughtered. In other years, we had black pigs, which we bought locally. Some families had sows and sold piglets to earn money. Uncle suggested to Father that he buy a white one because it got bigger and fatter more quickly than the black pigs.

"Don't kill my pig. It's our playmate," I said.

"Do you want to sleep with it instead of eat it?" Mother teased.

"If you slaughter it, I'll cry," I said.

"We must slaughter our pig, otherwise we'll have no meat with which to celebrate the New Year," Father said.

"We can buy it in the Chinese markets. Our pig is too lovely to eat," I said, sitting down for breakfast.

"I'll buy a new piglet for you and your brother to play with," Father offered.

"No. Please, I just want this one," I begged.

"Lha mo, this is adults' business. Don't talk too much," Mother said.

"Father, are you really going to slaughter my pig?" I said, tears welling in my eyes.

"Tomorrow after we slaughter the pig, you can call all your friends to our home for lunch. Your mother will cook rice and meat for us," Father said.

"Sorry. I'm not going to eat my pig," I declared, and refused to finish my meal.

"Don't be silly my child," Grandfather said.

"I'm not silly. You are the ones that are silly," I said.

"Dear, come with me. After breakfast I'm going to visit Bkra shis," Grandfather suggested.

Bkra shis was Grandfather's friend and ten years older than Grandfather. That year he was in his sixties and lived in his nephew's wife's home. Bkra shis and Grandfather frequently spent time together.

"I'm not in the mood to go with you. I'm going to take my pig and we'll leave home together," I said loudly, hoping my parents would hear.

"You're leaving with your pig, are you? OK, if you really leave and take the pig with you, I won't slaughter it," Father said, watching me through the window.

I was extremely sad about the pig. I stayed in the sty with it that whole day. I played with the pig and talked to it. Even as a five-year-old girl, I felt really bad that people killed other living beings to celebrate New Year. I thought it showed people's lack of compassion.

Father made a simple stone stove in the garden and borrowed a pot big enough to hold the pig from our neighbor. Mother spent the whole afternoon fetching water to fill the pot, hurrying between our home and the spring where we drew our water. Father also prepared much wood. When I saw all this, I knew I would surely lose my pig, a suspicion that was confirmed when I saw Uncle come to my home with several knives.

I said, "Uncle, please convince Father not to kill my pig."

"Lha mo! That is a pig – not a dog or cat. We must kill it and enjoy eating it," Uncle said.

"Why are all of you so heartless? I'm going to run away from home," I said again, and then I hugged Grandfather's neck and sobbed.

"Girl, don't make me angry. You like eating meat more than any of us," Father said.

"What a silly girl. What's wrong with slaughtering a pig? All the other children are happy about the New Year and having meat to eat. What's the matter with you?" Uncle said.

"She is too young to understand. We should ignore what she says," Mother said, and handed me a package of candy. "Lha mo, you

have a ghost inside you today. Really, something is wrong with you. You should change your bad attitude. You know your father beats naughty children," she chastised.

"I think I have the right to say the pig shouldn't be slaughtered, because Grandfather and I fed it. I can say you both have no right to kill the pig," I continued, sitting on Grandfather's lap.

"Girl, keep quiet. Don't make your father angry," Grandfather said.

Later, Grandfather took me to Bkra shis' home where they cooked noodles for lunch. I enjoyed being with them.

"Lha mo, can I join your party tomorrow? I heard your family will slaughter a pig tomorrow. It'll be fun. When I was a child, my family was very poor and didn't have a pig to slaughter, so I waited for my friends' parties. Will you invite old people?" Bkra shis asked.

"Please don't mention the pig. I feel so terrible that I think I'll die with it. I love that pig, and want to keep it as a pet, but my parents disagree," I said.

"Ha! You're talking like a mature lady," Bkra shis laughed.

"It is very bad to kill a living creature to celebrate New Year. Don't you agree?" I said.

"I know it's bad, but that's a pig's life," Bkra shis said.

"I'm not going to let them kill my pig," I said again, but they both ignored me.

That evening, when Grandfather and I returned home, my parents, Brother, and Uncle were having dinner.

"Where have you been? I was looking for you two," Mother asked.

"We went to Bkra shis' home and ate," Grandfather said, joining them. I didn't speak to them. I just went directly to my bedroom.

"Lha mo, don't you want some rice with fried potatoes?" Mother asked.

I ignored her. I went to bed without talking and fell asleep as soon as I put my head on my pillow.

When I woke up the next morning, I heard Mother's voice coming from the kitchen. "Where should I put the blood?"

"In a metal pot. Take the basin back to the garden. There's more blood," Father said.

I realized my pig was dead. Tears streamed from my eyes. That was the saddest day of my life up to that point. Grandfather was

not in bed. I knew he was in the shrine, lighting butter lamps for the poor pig. I had nothing to say. I realized how powerless I was, and hated myself that day. My feelings were very strong, but I didn't know how to express them. I became like a sick old woman. My energy was gone. I wrapped myself in my blanket and cried.

"Lha mo! It's noon. You should get up. You're acting more like an ancient grandmother than a young girl!" Grandfather teased.

I wasn't in the mood to reply, so I ignored him.

"Lha mo, get up and call your friends to come and have lunch," Mother said from my bedroom door.

I said nothing. My beating heart hurt. A short time later I heard Father and Uncle carrying half of the pig carcass into the kitchen.

"See, your pig was really well-fed. Its meat is very good," Uncle praised.

"Yeah, that's because Father and Lha mo fed it beans and potatoes," Mother said.

"It's hard to be a cook without meat," Mother said.

"I know. Both of your children like meat," Uncle replied.

"OK, let's go get the other half, and then we'll have lunch," Father said.

"Can you chop some up for me? I need to cook it with cabbage," Mother asked.

"Today, there will be many children so we shouldn't serve much fat. They don't like it," Father said.

"I didn't see Lha mo yet. Where is she? Is she still angry?" Father enquired.

"She's in bed. I think she's still dreaming," Mother said.

"She should go call her friends," Father said, and came to my bed. He pulled my blanket away, saying, "Are you a pig? Are you going to invite your friends?"

"Let me sleep. I'm not going to eat my pig," I answered.

"You should invite your friends or they won't invite you when they slaughter their pigs," Mother said.

"Please don't bother me. I'm sick," I said.

Then they left me alone. My empty belly was groaning for food. I heard my friends in my home, having lunch in the kitchen.

"Aunt, where is Lha mo?" Sgron ma, my best friend, asked.

"She is sick. She doesn't want lunch," Mother replied.

I knew that was Mother's trick. I really wanted to join them,

but when I thought about my lovely pig, I couldn't.

I didn't get up until evening. I really couldn't bear my hunger any longer and finally went to the kitchen. My parents, Grandfather, Uncle, and Uncle's wife were making sausages.

Everyone was a bit surprised. "Oh, you are still alive! Come have some sausage. I'm sure you'll like it," Uncle said.

"Of course I'm still alive. If you want, you can slaughter me like my pig, you heartless people," I said defiantly, sitting near Grandfather.

"Girl, stop right there. He is your uncle and you should be polite to him," Father scolded, his face growing red.

I was scared. When Father was very angry he beat me. I said nothing and kept quiet. "Don't scold them, or your father will beat you," Grandfather whispered.

"Darling, come! I left some dishes and rice for you from lunch. I know you're hungry," Mother said.

I hugged Mother's neck and cried.

"Oh, what's the matter? Are you all right?" Mother asked, looking at my face.

"Your eyes are swelling. Are you sick?" Mother said in concern.

"I know how you feel. You are too young to understand these things. One day you'll be a mother and then you'll know everything," Father said.

"Well. The sausage is ready. Everyone, come have some," Uncle's wife invited.

Father had chopped up the internal organs, mixed them with *rtsam pa* and blood, and added spices. This stuffing was then poured into the intestines and boiled for a half hour. I really liked sausage, and I was starving, so, reluctantly, I began eating.

"Ha! You said you wouldn't eat your pig. What you are eating now is your pig," Father teased.

"I was really sad. Really. I cried the whole morning," I said while eating.

Everybody laughed. "Because you missed sausage or because you were hungry?" Uncle's wife teased.

I was not happy with her teasing, but I pretended to laugh and said nothing more.

After dinner, Father and Uncle chopped the meat in pieces, put it in the pot, added salt, mixed it, and then hung it above the

kitchen stove.

"Why is the pork mixed with salt?" I asked.

"We must keep the pork for a long time. Salt stops the meat from spoiling," Mother said.

We enjoyed the pork, but I also really missed my pig.



Brag 'go County Town (August 2011, Tshes bcu lha mo).

TUMBLING OFF A HORSE

Lha mo, do you want to come with me tomorrow? If you do, please get up when I do in the morning," Grandfather said before going to bed one night.

"Where are you going? I don't want to get up very early," I said.

"I'm going to drive our old horse up the hill. We'll look after it for two or three hours, leave it there, and return home for lunch," Grandfather said.

"Will we go back later?" I asked.

"Yeah. Maybe we can cook our favorite noodles for lunch," Grandfather suggested.

"I think we should take lunch, spend the day with the horse, and then come back before its dark," I said.

"What a great idea! My girl is growing up," Grandfather said.

"What should we take for lunch?" I asked.

"*Rtsam pa* and vegetables, and we can boil tea there," Grandfather replied.

"We'll be with the horse the whole day with nothing special to do. What about taking some rice and cooking it?" I said.

"Oh, you're so smart," Grandfather flattered. Then he added, "OK. Go to sleep. We need to get up early."

I was always happy to be with Grandfather, but it really was very hard for me to get up early. I was the first child and first grandchild, so everybody spoiled me. They really tried their best to give me whatever I wanted.

"Get up my Bu," Grandfather said the next morning, waking me.

I felt that the night had been only an hour long. I was so sleepy that I couldn't open my eyes. "Please let me sleep another hour," I said, covering my head with the blanket.

"OK. Sleep the whole day if you like. You'll be the only one at home. Your parents are going to help your uncle collect bushes for fuel," Grandfather said.

"I'll come, but help me open my eyes," I replied.

Every morning when Mother came to wake me, she brought a wet towel and put it on my face. This moistened my eyelashes and made it easier for me to wake up.

Grandfather put a very cold towel on my face, which made me jump up.

"Grandfather, what a bad man you are!" I exclaimed.

"This is a useful way to wake you up," Grandfather said.

"Please prepare my breakfast, I'll be there in a minute," I demanded.

"OK, boss! What else can I do for you?" Grandfather replied.

"Put extra sugar in my *rtsam pa*," I said. At that time, we were very poor and we could not have sugar in our *rtsam pa* every time.

My breakfast was ready when I reached the kitchen. I liked it when Grandfather made *rtsam pa* for me, because the *rtsam pa* he made was so delicious. He had left the *rtsam pa* for me on the stove, but he wasn't there. I thought he must have abandoned me.

"Grandfather! Where are you?" I called.

"There's milk in your bowl. Finish your breakfast and I'll be back soon!" Grandfather shouted from the stable.

I finished my breakfast quickly. When I got to the stable, he was ready to leave. He had packed everything for lunch in a bag.

"Do you want to ride the horse? I think it's too far for you to walk because you get tired easily," Grandfather said.

"I'm afraid the horse will toss me off. It doesn't have a saddle," I said.

"The horse is too old to do anything so energetic," Grandfather replied.

"OK. I'll ride it," I agreed.

He put me on the tall, black horse. As usual, we tied a string of amulets around our horse's neck to protect it, and I thought if the horse bucked I could grab the string of amulets. This wasn't my first time riding a horse bareback.

"Are you OK? Squeeze the horse's flanks with your legs. Don't kick near its legs, because that's its most sensitive part. If you kick it there, the horse may buck and you will fall," explained Grandfather.

"It's all right. I'm not a coward," I declared proudly.

"Do you want me to lead it?" Grandfather asked.

"It's better if you do," I said.

He carried the lunch bag and a big patched umbrella on his

back, and led the horse.

"Do you want to ride? I can lead the horse for you," I suggested.

"That's very generous of you, but I'm a better walker than you," Grandfather said.

"But you're my grandfather and I'm your granddaughter," I explained.

"So?" Grandfather responded.

"I want to be a good granddaughter," I added.

Grandfather chuckled and continued leading the horse.

Though it was summer, the morning was chilly and foggy. We had to walk through farmland. We were the first people on the road that morning. The bushes were wet. I also noticed that Grandfather's shoes were getting wet, but he didn't let that bother him.

"Grandfather. Get on behind me. Both of us can ride," I said.

"You can see how old this horse is. Horses cannot talk like us, but they are also sentient creatures. We must treat our yaks, horses, and dogs nicely, otherwise we'll be punished by Buddha after we die," Grandfather said. "No matter your age, you should be aware of such things. You can see that people never give dogs any freedom. Dogs need to wear a heavy collar around their necks and spend their lives chained to a stake. They are fed only *rtsam pa* and water," Grandfather said.

"Sometimes my parents scold me when I give a lot of *rtsam pa* to our dog," I said.

"They lack compassion. Be different," Grandfather urged.

It wasn't far from my home to the herding place, but Grandfather walked very slowly. He described many mountains, hills, rivers, and forests as we passed them.

"Lha mo, if you get up early and go out like this, it's very good for your health, especially when you get older. Your body aches and shrinks. Getting up early and having fresh air is very important," Grandfather said.

"Ha! Grandfather, you're very funny! I'm only six so I'm not in need of fresh air. You just don't want to walk alone, and that's why you're telling me this," I teased.

"If you don't want to come, you can return home, but there won't be anyone there to cook for you," Grandfather said.

"I'm kidding. I like being with you. This is an amazing time," I said.

"Ha! Silly girl! You really are growing up. Well, we need to water the horse and there is no water at the top of the hill. Also, we need to get some water for ourselves for lunch," Grandfather said, walking to a small river.

"Do I need to dismount?" I asked.

"Of course, unless you want to fall in the water," Grandfather said, and lifted me off the horse. He threw the reins on the horse's back and let it drink while he untied his bag, took out a white bottle, filled it with water, and then put it back in the bag.

"I can carry the bag. I'm on the horse, so I won't feel tired," I said.

"You think you can carry this?" Grandfather queried.

"The horse can carry it for us," I said.

"But you must put it on your back. It'll be heavy for you. Do you want to try?" Grandfather said.

"OK," I said.

He put the bag on my back. It was heavier than I had expected, and so I couldn't stand up straight with it on my back.

"What do you think? You need to grow up more," Grandfather said.

I felt bad. My dream was to grow up fast so that I could go to school with other children, and then be a big girl.

"Come mount the horse. We need to climb the hill now," Grandfather said, and lifted me back on the horse.

I held onto the string of amulets around the horse's neck. Grandfather carried the bag and led the horse toward the hill. I was thinking about how to grow up faster and go to school. My body was on the horse, but my mind was elsewhere.

"Grab the string of amulets and horse's mane. We're going to climb the hill. The path twists and is rough," Grandfather cautioned as he walked.

"No problem," I said.

Grandfather was singing his favorite folk song while climbing the hill. When climbing a mountain or hill, singing gets rid of tiredness. I sang along with him, though I didn't know the lyrics. I improvised, "Father, Mother, Grandfather, Brother, I love you all and, today, Grandfather is going to cook my favorite rice on the hill. *Oh... la... la... la... I'm so happy.*"

While I was singing, the horse climbed up a steep section and my bottom began slipping down its back. I grabbed the string of

amulets and mane tightly, but suddenly, the string came undone and my hand slipped from the mane. I slipped backwards off the horse and fell among sharp rocks. My bottom hurt and I didn't know what to do. By the time I had regained my senses, Grandfather was already gone. He had poor hearing and hadn't heard me fall off.

"Grandfather! Grandfather!" I called.

I realized he was still singing and walking up the path. "Grandfather!" I called over and over, but he didn't hear me.

I was shocked but I didn't cry, maybe because nobody was there to comfort me. Gradually, Grandfather vanished from my view. After about ten minutes the pain lessened. I stood and started to follow after Grandfather. When I was halfway to the top, I saw Grandfather coming downhill.

"Lha mo! Lha mo! Where are you?" Grandfather shouted.

"I'm here! Don't worry about me! Nothing happened!" I shouted back.

His voice was trembling, which made me sad. Salty tears streaked my dirty cheeks. It was the hardest thing for me to wash my face. I liked my unwashed face, even though it was marred with tears and snot.

When Grandfather saw me, he was delighted, and hugged me tightly. "My Buddha, I thought you were, you were..." he stammered.

"Ha... you thought I had died!" I finished.

"I really thought you must have smashed your head on the sharp rocks," Grandfather blurted out, and pushed me away. I saw tears flowing down his dark wrinkled face.

"I'm sorry! I really tried to grab the mane, but I couldn't," I said.

Men don't usually cry, but I was Grandfather's treasure. He loved me more than himself. When I saw that he was sad, I promised myself, "I'll grow up quickly and give him a happy life."

"I thought you were seriously injured. My Bu, you are lucky that nothing happened, otherwise I would die," Grandfather said.

"When did you realize that I was not on the horse?" I asked.

"When I got to where we are going to cook, I put my bag on the grass and then turned around to lift you from the horse. You were gone. I thought you were teasing me, then realized you must have fallen from the horse. Then I ran back," Grandfather explained.

"Don't worry, nothing bad happened," I said to comfort him, even though my bottom was still aching.

He led me to the hilltop and tethered the horse near us. He gave me some candy and opened our umbrella.

"Well, let's rest for a bit. I'll cook lunch. I'm sure you're hungry," Grandfather said.

The sun had finally broken through the morning mist. The sky was blue and the earth was green everywhere. I could hear the sound of the river at the foot of the hill, and birds chirping in the distance. I took off my coat and lay on the grass. My bottom still hurt, but I didn't tell Grandfather. He soon finished cooking, and we enjoyed a nice meal. Our day on the hill was enjoyable and memorable.



Gser rta bla rung Monastery, Gser rta County (August 2011, Tshes bcu lha mo).

A GHOSTLY YAK

After harvesting, the livestock are no longer herded and watched closely. We drive them out in the morning, and children go and bring them back in the afternoon. In the spring, and summer, however, villagers take turns herding each other's livestock away from the fields. This leaves the adult women free to work in the fields, and also prevents livestock from eating the growing crops. After harvest, there is much fresh grass and other vegetation in the mountains for livestock to eat.

One day when I was fourteen years old, Mother shouted from the kitchen window as I left in the morning to go to school, "Lha mo, try to come back home as soon as possible after school."

"OK! I promised Bstan 'dzin I would go herding with him this afternoon," I replied.

"Your father and I are going to the County Town to buy rice and other things so we can celebrate the end of harvest. When you get home this evening, we'll be ready for dinner," Mother said. We celebrated the end of harvest every year.

"OK! Great! Don't forget to fry my favorite potatoes," I said, and ran after my friends and Brother.

My classmates all talked about how they would celebrate the end of harvest. The celebration day wasn't fixed. The time depended on when harvest finished, which changed every year. This, in turn, was determined by the weather and how fast the family harvested. Most parents bought beef and made steamed stuffed dumplings to celebrate. We considered these dumplings to be the best and most delicious food. My parents bought candy as well.

After school, I found Cousin and called, "Bstan 'dzin, shall we go home faster? Today is the first day we can let our livestock go wherever they want. Maybe it will be hard for us to round them up."

"Yeah! Let's go," Bstan 'dzin said. His sister promised to look after my little brother. We ran all the way home in eight minutes, even though it usually took fifteen minutes.

"Let's go to my home, put our bags there, and ask for

something to eat," I suggested. Bstan 'dzin was a year older than me. We were neighbors, and his father and my mother were cousins. We were very close, and often played together. Sometimes we also fought. His family was richer than mine. Whenever we needed help, they always assisted us.

"Good! No one is at my home," Bstan 'dzin said. He really liked Grandfather, as did most village children. Grandfather was a humble, kind old man.

When we got home, Grandfather was cooking. "I knew my sweet grandfather would do anything for me," I said and hugged him.

"Oh, Bstan 'dzin, I haven't seen you for a long time. How is school?" Grandfather asked.

"I'm doing well. I've missed you," Bstan 'dzin replied.

"We need something to eat, and then we are going to bring the livestock back home. Did you see where the livestock headed?" I said.

"Yes. I'll give you directions. I cooked some potatoes for you. They're ready to eat now," Grandfather said, opening the pot lid.

"Wow, that's so sweet of you," I exclaimed.

He put some potatoes in a plastic bag and added a small bottle of spice with salt. I filled a big glass bottle with water.

"Shall we go?" I asked Bstan 'dzin while he was watching cartoons on my family's black and white TV. Even though the TV received only a single channel, we were all fascinated by it.

"Bstan 'dzin, did your family celebrate the end of harvest?" Grandfather asked.

"Yes. Two days ago. How about your family?" Bstan 'dzin enquired.

"My family finished harvesting yesterday, so tonight we're going to celebrate. Come join us if you like," Grandfather said.

"What did your family cook for the celebration?" I asked.

"Father bought half a small yak. We cooked the meat and ate it with bread. Mother made some beef soup, too," Bstan 'dzin said.

"Wow, I wish my parents would buy a half-yak, and then we could often eat meat." I said. I really admired his family.

"I'm going to ask permission from my mother to sleep over," Bstan 'dzin said. We always asked permission from our parents to sleep over in somebody else's home.

"Bstan 'dzin, let's go now," I said nervously, concerned that it was getting late.

Grandfather pointed in the direction the livestock had headed,

and we set off, eating potatoes as we walked.

"Cousin, your potatoes are tastier than mine," I teased.

He looked at me with a surprised face and asked, "Why?"

"Because you have a special spice from your nose," I said and laughed. He laughed, too, and used the back of his right hand to wipe away his snot.

"Look at the back of your hands. They are like pot soot. Don't wipe your nose with your hands," I advised. Even though he was older than me, I was much cleaner because I was a girl.

We were lucky because when we were halfway, we saw somebody herding the livestock down from the mountain top.

"I'm worried one of my family's yaks won't be there. It usually likes to be alone," Bstan 'dzin said.

"Well, we'll see when we get there," I said.

Bstan 'dzin was timid. If he had to go into the forest alone, he cried like a baby. Two months earlier, some village women had discovered a corpse in a small forest near our village when they were collecting fuel. They smelled something terrible and then found the corpse of a middle-aged Chinese man. Villagers called the police, who came and investigated. They found the corpse was badly decomposed. The dead man was Chinese, and had five *yuan* and his ID card in the chest pocket of his blue jacket. After villagers buried him, Bstan 'dzin never dared enter that forest again.

When we reached the livestock, we saw that the herder was our neighbor, Dga' ba, a young man who, though mentally handicapped, was a very good herder. We thanked him, but we didn't see Bstan 'dzin's rogue yak.

"Lha mo, what should I do?" Bstan 'dzin asked nervously.

"I'm here, so don't worry," I comforted.

I saw tears in his eyes. He treated small things like they were the end of the world. I pitied him. I said, "Bstan 'dzin, you are like my younger brother, please act like a boy."

"Can you herd these livestock back home for us? I must go with Cousin to find his yak," I said to Dga' ba.

"Sure, your grandfather is my best friend," Dga' ba replied.

"Let's go," I said to Bstan 'dzin and tugged his arm.

It was now about six-thirty, and would soon be dark. We ran toward the grove. Bstan 'dzin knew the yak was there. This old yak was tall, thin, and didn't like being with other yaks. When we got near the forest, it was already so dark that we couldn't see well.

"What should we do? I'm terrified of that Chinese man who died here," Bstan 'dzin wailed, clutching my hand tightly.

"Don't worry. I have a plan," I announced.

I was good at throwing stones long distances. I gathered a small pile of stones and shouted as I threw them into the grove, trying to flush the yak out.

"But my yak never moves, even when I kick it. It's a very tough yak. I wish it were dead," Bstan 'dzin moaned.

"I'm sure these stones will make it come out," I said confidently.

A few minutes later, I heard something. I was sure it was his yak. "I think it's coming. I heard something," I said.

Bstan 'dzin shouted. When I turned, his hands were pressed over his ears and he was lying on the grass.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"It's that Chinese man! Those sounds aren't from my yak," Bstan 'dzin whimpered.

I had heard many ghost stories from Grandfather. Every time he finished, he explained that there really was no such thing as ghosts. Therefore, I didn't believe in ghosts.

"Don't act stupidly. Look, your yak is laughing at you," I said.

It was, indeed, his yak, emerging from the grove with two other yaks.

The way back was rough, but at least we had his yak. I held Bstan 'dzin's hand to comfort him, and we set out behind the yaks.

"I told you that you would be safe with me," I said.

"I really appreciate it. I hope Father slaughters this yak for Lo sar. I really hate it," Bstan 'dzin said.

There was a river where we get drinking water near our village. The yaks didn't go over the bridge, but swam across the river instead. The river was too deep for us to cross, so we went over the bridge. When we got home, the yaks were already there, and Father was looking for me in the village.

"Is that you, Lha mo?" Father asked worriedly.

"Yes, Father. It's me," I replied.

"I was worried until I heard Bstan 'dzin's mother say that her yak was missing," Father said.

"I helped Bstan 'dzin look for it, and we found it," I said proudly.

Bstan 'dzin's Mother came out of their stable and said, "Lha

mo, thanks for helping him. He's terrified to be alone in the dark. I heard you were with him, so I didn't come. I knew you would help him."

"Aunt, if you don't mind, I want Bstan 'dzin to sleep over at our home tonight," I said.

"Tonight we will celebrate the end of harvest," Father added.

"Uh... OK," his Mother said with some hesitation.

"She wants me to help feed the animals," Bstan 'dzin said.

"I'll help Bstan 'dzin feed your animals, and then we can go to my home. I think Mother is still cooking," I said.

"We're ready for dinner, but we'll wait for you," Father said.

"What did you cook?" I asked.

"You'll know when you get home," Father said.

I helped Bstan 'dzin feed his family's fifteen yaks and horses. Then we ran to my home, eager to enjoy the special feast.

We could smell dumplings. "I smell what you cooked," I said as I entered the kitchen door. I saw Brother was eating something from a plastic bag.

"I bet you bought him his favorite cookie," I said.

"Yes, and we bought you your favorite, too," Father said, handing me a bag of milk candy.

"Thanks. I'll give some to Bstan 'dzin and Brother, too," I said.

"You are always generous. Blo bzang, why don't you share some with Bstan 'dzin?" Grandfather suggested.

"OK, but first we should have dinner. I really miss dumplings," Blo bzang said.

We had a delicious and enjoyable dinner, but I didn't have fried potatoes. Mother packed the rest of the dumplings for our lunch at school the next day.

A MISERABLE MARRIAGE

Lha mo, go and see who is making that dog bark madly," Grandfather said while we were having breakfast.

I put my *rtsam pa* bowl down on the table and ran outside. As I reached the ladder to the first floor, I saw my youngest aunt, Bde skyid, climbing up.

"Aunt Bde skyid, aren't you afraid of our dog? You are the first person who doesn't need to be protected from it. Be careful! He recently attacked our neighbor," I said.

She ignored me, not even giving me as much as a glance. I said nothing and followed her.

"Bang!" She hit the kitchen door, which swung out and struck the wall loudly. Everyone in the kitchen looked at her curiously.

"Brother, Sister ran away with Pad+ma last night to his aunt's home," she said breathlessly before stepping into the kitchen.

"Come in," Mother said and poured her a bowl of milk tea.

"What did you say? Explain more," Father encouraged.

"Our sister, Sgrol ma, ran away with our neighbor's son, Pad+ma, to his aunt's home. Her husband came to our home and told us that they want to marry, and quoted Pad+ma as saying there is no way to separate them," Aunt Bde skyid said.

"I'm glad Sgrol ma chose Pad+ma rather than Byams pa. Pad+ma has a good sense of humor, and is a good boy. Byams pa is handsome, but has nothing else," Mother said.

"You think Pad+ma is a good boy? I don't like the way he talks. He often brags," Father retorted.

"Your sister has come here because your mother wants your suggestions. Now is not the time for you two to discuss these things. Go bring them back," Grandfather said.

When two people fall in love and want to marry, they decide which family they will live with, because a child must marry and stay with their parents. If both sides have married siblings already living with the parents, then the new couple must build their own house. If they elope, they must find a relative's home to go to and stay for a

short while. Aunt and Pad+ma wanted to marry and live in his home.

Pad+ma's father had died when he was a baby, and so his mother then took care of the three children. Later, she had married two men, but they had also died. Pad+ma was the only child in his family who could look after his single mother and his other siblings. His older brother was mentally unbalanced, and his younger sister was fifteen years younger than Pad+ma.

"If she thinks he is best for her, I have nothing to say," Father said. Then he took a cigarette from its pack and lit it with shaking hands. I realized he was unhappy about what Aunt Sgrol ma had done.

"Pad+ma's uncle-in-law asked you to come home and talk to him," Aunt Bde skyid said.

"Yeah! I thought as much. Don't take too long to think. Go talk to them. You must allow them to marry. Love is powerful. Even if you want to separate them, you can't. Even though you are Sgrol ma's brother, they have made their own decision. They love each other. Don't do anything silly," Grandfather suggested.

"I know I don't have the authority to split them, but I won't forgive him if he doesn't treat my sister well," Father said, a cigarette between his lips.

"Just go and figure out what's going to happen next," Mother said.

"She's going to marry him all right, but since they live in our village you'll be able to observe how he treats your sister. Don't worry too much," Grandfather continued.

"What should I tell that man? I've never encountered such a thing before," Father said.

"If you want me to come with you, I can. But I think it's better for just you to go, because I'm not related to your sister," Grandfather said.

"Brother, I think we should leave soon," Aunt Bde skyid urged.

"First, bring Pad+ma's uncle-in-law and go to Pad+ma's home to see his mother. Talk to her, because your sister is going to marry into their home. See what his mother thinks. I think she would love your sister to be her daughter-in-law, because I heard her say that she knew Sgrol ma was Pad+ma's girlfriend. After both sides agree to the marriage, then go with Pad+ma's uncle-in-law to his home to get your sister and Pad+ma. Tell them that both sides agree to their marriage,

so they will come back happily. Then send Pad+ma to his home and tell his mother that you will be at her home tomorrow morning. Take some bottles of liquor and go to Pad+ma's home to discuss their future plans. Take one of your brothers and Sgrol ma with you. It's important that you tell them you are going to choose an auspicious day for their wedding. Don't postpone the wedding. These people are young, and it's easy for them to change their minds. It's best for them to marry during Lo sar, which is coming in six weeks," Grandfather said. He knew a lot about these matters and could give useful advice.

"When should I visit a *bla ma* and ask him to choose a good wedding day?" Father asked.

"Let me think," Grandfather said and then paused. "Let's say next Sunday. Sooner is better. Ask Pad+ma's mother to come with you on that day. She's the only person who will be available for Pad+ma," Grandfather continued.

I was listening so intently that I forgot to finish my breakfast. I was amazed by so many concerns that I didn't know about.

"Will I have to run to somebody's home when I want to be a nun?" I asked, thinking that becoming a nun and getting married were similar. My silly question brought peals of laughter.

"How? How could a nun run away with a man? A nun never marries," Mother explained.

"I don't want you to be a nun, but I do want our son to be a monk," Father said, which made me think that he was very mean.

"OK. Then I won't get married. You treat your children unfairly," I wailed, tears filling my eyes.

"Why do you take this so seriously? I love both of you. Don't be silly," Father comforted.

"Don't cry! I'll let you be a nun," Grandfather said, and hugged me as Father went to put on clean clothes.

"What do your parents think about Sgrol ma's marriage?" Mother asked.

"They think Pad+ma is the best man for Sgrol ma," Aunt Bde skyid said.

"Your brother likes Pad+ma, except for his bragging. At least Pad+ma will be a reliable husband," Mother said.

"I also don't like his way of talking at all. Sometimes, he talks too much, but if Sgrol ma likes him that's what's important," Aunt Bde skyid said.

"I won't come home tonight. I'll spend the night at Mother's.

My parents will have things to discuss," Father said.

"Do you want to come with me or do you want to stay and chat with your sister-in-law for a bit?" Father asked Aunt.

"Is there anything that I can help you with while my brother is gone?" Aunt Bde skyid asked.

"Not really, but if you want to stay, it's fine. I don't have anything in particular to do," Mother said.

"I think I should leave with Brother. Maybe I'll have to go to the County Town to shop," Aunt Bde skyid said.

After Father and Aunt left, the rest of us finished our breakfast. Brother and I were on winter vacation, and the only thing we had to do was our unfinished homework. I was a serious student and always finished my homework before Lo sar, so that I could have a relaxed holiday. Most students in my village did their homework at the last minute. Sometimes, they couldn't finish, and then their teachers gave them double homework as punishment.

"Lha mo, what are you thinking? Don't bite your pen, it contains poison," Mother warned, standing in front of me.

"I'm wondering why people marry. Marriage seems so bad. I don't want to get married," I said.

"I definitely want to marry Lha skyid. She's my favorite girl," Brother announced.

"Kid, you don't even know how to keep your nose clean. How are you going to marry a woman like your aunt?" Mother joked. Lha skyid was in her twenties, skinny, and tall. Brother, who was only seven years old, thought she was the most beautiful girl in the world.

"Mother, I'll grow up and then I'll be in my twenties, too," Brother added.

"When you are in your twenties, she'll be in her forties. Do you want to marry a woman like your mother?" I teased.

"Anyway, I love only her," Brother said, blushing.

"Your aunt is going to marry Pad+ma. Later, call Pad+ma 'Uncle'," Mother said.

"I'm going to call him 'Brother', because he's my buddy," Brother said.

"Me too, because he isn't that old," I agreed.

"Call him whatever you like. I just hope they'll be all right," Mother said.

Father came back the next evening. He looked tired, but he hadn't forgotten to buy candy for us.

"Here's some candy from your Aunt Sgrol ma. She was crying after she came home," Father said.

"Why did she cry? Did your parents scold her?" Mother asked.

"No, I think she regrets what she did," Father said.

"You are her closest sibling, and should listen to her feelings," Mother said.

"I wanted to, but I'm her brother, so I can't really ask here to go into details about her feelings," Father said. "But I think it's good for you to talk to her, because she likes you and treats you as her sister."

"OK, tomorrow I'll go talk to her," Mother offered.

"Now, it's too late to have regrets," Father said.

When I heard that my aunt had been crying, I started crying myself, "Will Aunt go to Pad+ma's home and stop being my aunty?" I sobbed, wiping away my tears.

"What are you talking about?" Father asked.

"She will be your aunt forever, but she will move to Pad+ma's home and be his wife," Mother explained.

Aunt Sgrol ma was very pretty and humble, and many boys wanted to marry her. Pad+ma was a short man with a big nose. In fact, 'Big Nose' was his nickname. He worked very hard. Pad+ma's family and my aunt's family were both poor.

"Did everything go smoothly?" Mother asked.

"Yes. Pad+ma's uncle came, and we had a good talk," Father said.

"When will you go to get an auspicious day for their wedding?" Mother asked.

"Next Sunday. Pad+ma's uncle will be there, too. Then we'll go to the monastery," Father said.

"Is Pad+ma's mother happy with Sgrol ma?" Mother asked.

"She said a lot of things about how to be a good daughter-in-law. It seemed she was lecturing us, which annoyed me. I finally said to her, 'This isn't why we are here. The point is whether you want your son and my sister to marry.' Then she calmed down. Pad+ma's uncle is very flexible – I like him," Father added.

When Mother went to see Sgrol ma the next morning, I asked to go with her. When we got there, we saw that Aunt Sgrol ma was washing clothes.

"Aunt, Mother is coming to talk to you. I heard you were crying last night," I said.

Mother prevented me from saying more and asked, "How are you doing?"

"I'm good," Aunt Sgrol ma murmured.

"Why did you cry? This is your choice. You picked him," Mother said.

"I didn't know I would regret it," Aunt Sgrol ma said.

"Did you have time to think about it at all?" Mother asked.

Aunt Sgrol ma suddenly began sobbing. "I wanted to marry Byams pa..." she said between gasps, "but everyone dislikes him, so I gave up on him."

"Don't cry. I understand," Mother comforted.

I loved Aunt Sgrol ma a lot, and felt sorry for her. I went into their kitchen and saw my father's parents sitting by the stove with somber expressions.

"Lha mo, my dear, come in," Grandfather said.

"We have some leftover noodles if you want some," Grandmother offered.

"No, thanks," I said. Then I heard Mother and Aunt talking, so I went over to them.

"I'll never forget Byams pa. Though I'm going to marry Pad+ma, I really don't love him. I was very angry when all my relatives were unhappy with Byams pa. I eloped with Pad+ma to take revenge. Now I realize how I have trapped myself. Though I don't want to marry Pad+ma, I have no choice," Aunt Sgrol ma lamented.

"Maybe I can talk to your brother about finding a solution," Mother proposed.

"The problem is that we made a promise. If one of us breaks our promise, that person must give all their family's property as compensation," Aunt Sgrol ma said.

"Oh, Buddha! What a silly promise!" Mother said very disappointedly.

"My life will end with a person I don't really love," Aunt Sgrol ma reflected, and resumed sobbing.

"Then we don't have any solutions. You must be strong and face reality," Mother said.

"The only solution is to kill myself," Aunt Sgrol ma said.

"Don't think of such horrible things! This isn't the end of the world. Love can be cultivated. Maybe you'll fall in love with Pad+ma after you've spent some time together. He's a lovely man," Mother added.

They talked for more than four hours. I was bored with adult concerns. "Shall we go home? I need to do my homework," I said.

"I told you not to come. You're always like this," Mother scolded.

"Don't worry about me, I'll face reality. I hope Pad+ma and I will marry soon," Aunt Sgrol ma said.

"This Sunday, your brother and Pad+ma's uncle will go to a *bla ma* and get the date for your wedding. I hope it will be during Lo sar," Mother said. Then we said goodbye to my grandparents and Aunt Sgrol ma and left.

On Sunday morning, Father rode one of our horses to the County Town. He visited a high-ranking *bla ma* and asked for the best date wedding date for Aunt Sgorol ma and Pad+ma.

"How did it go?" Mother asked when Father stepped into the kitchen that afternoon.

"It will be on the third day of Lo sar," Father said.

"Good. Have you decided to have a big wedding celebration?" Mother asked.

"I thought we should have a celebration and gather all the villagers, but Mother said it's too much for them," Father said.

"At least we should have a small celebration and gather all their close relatives," Mother suggested.

"I think so, too. My parents want to prepare some good furniture for Sgrol ma to take with her rather than having a big wedding," Father explained.

"That's good," Mother said.

"I think we should give her our new picture frames plus two bags of barley," Father suggested.

"Whatever you want to give to your sister is fine. Your sisters and brothers are just like my brothers and sisters," Mother said.

"As the eldest brother I should give her more, but she knows that our family is poor. Plus, our children are growing up, and we have more responsibilities," Father said.

"Lha mo, your aunt will marry Pad+ma soon. If you want, you can spend a few days with her. After she goes to Pad+ma's home, it will be hard for you to go there and spend time with her. Your aunt will always love you, but everything will change after she marries," Mother said.

"True. She loves you and your brother a lot. Go spend a few nights with her," Father encouraged.

I went to Aunt's home that afternoon. She was tired and worried. I was much younger than she was, but she told me everything.

"Aunt, I've come to spend a few nights with you before you get married," I said as soon as I saw her.

She giggled, and said, "Won't you visit me when I'm in Pad+ma's home?"

"I will, but I won't spend the night there," I said.

"Why? I'm still your aunt," Aunt Sgrol ma said.

"Yes, but Mother said things will change," I said. That made Aunt a little upset.

I stayed in her home for a month. When I returned home, it was time for Lo sar.

"Lha mo, tomorrow we'll go to the County Town to buy new clothes for you," Mother said.

"I want a nice long pink coat. I want to wear it on the third day of Lo sar for Aunt's wedding," I said.

"Aren't you sad about your aunt leaving?" Mother said.

"Aunt told me many things. She said that she is now happy to marry Pad+ma. I think we should be glad for her," I said.

"I'm glad she's happy," Father said.

My parents took me to the County Town the next day. We bought blankets for Aunt to take to her new home. My parents purchased a pink coat for me.

My family celebrated only the first day of Lo sar at my home that year. We were all busy getting ready for Aunt's wedding. The rule is that you must stay at your own home and enjoy time with your family on the first day of Lo sar. On the second day, we all went to Aunt's home and had a great time with all the family members together. The wedding was on the third day. Aunt left for her husband's home on the morning of the fourth day. Father was the eldest child, so he had to escort Aunt to Pad+ma's home.

On the third day, all our relatives came to the wedding with bottles of liquor tied with a red piece of cloth. They each gave some money to Aunt's family. Some relatives gave Aunt cash and such items as blankets, wooden beds, and kitchen utensils.

Aunt's family provided rice and three different dishes of food for lunch, and candy and drinks for the children. Pad+ma's uncle came to Aunt's home that afternoon on foot because Pad+ma's home was just behind Aunt's. If the bride and groom live far from each

other, they ride horses or cars to get the bride or the groom. The person who comes to take the bride must be closely related to the groom, which is why Pad+ma's uncle came. He wore an expensive, traditional red silk robe, a white silk shirt, a pair of wide white pants, and black leather boots.

That night, Mother and Aunt Bde skyid helped Aunt Sgrol ma wash and braid her hair. Before this, Pad+ma's uncle came and prayed to the Three Jewels⁶ for good fortune.

Local villagers, neighbor villagers, and relatives gather for a big wedding. Two or three people – the bridetakers – come to escort the bride. They wear expensive clothes and jewelry. Most relatives spend the night. When somebody is going to marry and leave their parents' home, the wedding is not much fun, because everybody feels sad for the bride.

Aunt Sgrol ma's best friends came. Most people didn't sleep that night. They chatted and drank, but I fell asleep in a corner of the corridor. When I woke up, somebody had covered me with a big coat, and I could hear people crying. I thought something bad had happened, so I pulled off the big coat, and rushed into the guest room, where I saw my female relatives and Aunt's Sgrol ma's girlfriends dressing Aunt Sgrol ma. Mother was braiding her hair. A bride's hair is extended using false hair and braided with red thread. Red symbolizes that she is married, and her husband is alive. When a husband dies, the widow uses green thread to braid her hair as a sign of mourning. After braiding the hair, it is rolled up on her head and the two ends are tied at in the back of the head. A net hat covers it.

"Why are you crying?" I asked. It seemed like somebody had died. Aunt bowed her head and continued sobbing.

"You are a child and don't understand adult issues," one of Aunt Sgrol ma's friends said.

"At least I know there is no reason to cry like at a funeral," I said.

"Lha mo, what are you saying?" Mother scolded.

Then I saw Father was wearing his best traditional clothes. He looked great. "Is your aunt ready?" Father asked.

"I don't know. They are just gathered in the room and sobbing," I said.

⁶ The Three Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the community of Buddhist believers.

They were ready to leave after breakfast. Aunt Sgrol ma was dressed in a red wool robe and red silk shirt. She wore a pair of large traditional silver earrings and a fox-skin hat. She also wore a gold necklace, borrowed from one of our relatives. She looked nice.

When the bride leaves, her mother cannot follow her. When Aunt Sgrol ma left, Grandmother was in the kitchen, and didn't follow her to the gate. The rest of us went with Aunt Sgrol ma to the gate. Pad+ma's uncle was first, leading the way. Aunt Sgrol ma followed. Father was behind her. On the wedding day, the bride should keep her head down. They walked slowly and silently to Pad+ma's home where there were many people waiting for the bride. All the people at Aunt Sgrol's home were crying, but I didn't cry.

Pad+ma's family then celebrated. Afterward, my uncles drove a tractor and trailer to transport the dowry to Pad+ma's home. Pad+ma's family had loud music and seemed very happy while our family members looked sad.

Aunt Sgrol ma became pregnant some months later. We were in the same village so the news spread fast. I didn't see her until after she gave birth. Brother and I took a piece of butter and visited her on our way to school. She looked weak and tired. The baby looked like a toy with a wrinkled face.

One morning, Pad+ma came to my home and said to Father, "Your sister doesn't smile at my older brother. My brother and Mother always complain about that. I don't know why Sgrol ma hates my brother. When I ask her, she gets angry and tries to beat me. You know that my brother is a little eccentric, but he is my brother."

"I know why, so let me tell you. Did you tell Sgrol ma to marry both your brother and you? I heard when you were away your brother attacked Sgrol ma. She married you, not your brother. Your brother is odd, so who's going to marry him? I was thinking of talking to you, but you came to me first," Mother said.

"I thought it would be good if Sgrol ma accepted my brother, and then we would have a much easier life," explained Pad+ma.

"Don't suggest such silly things to my sister," Father said.

"You two married for love. Try to understand your wife's feelings," Mother said.

"Pad+ma, whatever you think or want to do is up to you, but if you do anything that makes my sister unhappy...well, we'll see what happens then," Father cautioned with a red face.

That summer, I went to Aunt Sgrol ma's home to babysit. At

night I had to sleep there, because there were only Pad+ma's brother and Aunt Sgrol ma with her baby. Pad+ma was away doing construction work, and his mother and sister were away at a religious ritual. We locked our bedroom door very securely. Pad+ma's brother was a tall, strong man. We were afraid he would push the door open and come in.

Aunt Sgrol ma told me that in the middle of the night, when she was in her bedroom with her baby, somebody pushed her door open and came toward her bed in the dark. She was terrified. When she turned on the light, it was Pad+ma's brother, Zla ba, and he was half naked. Aunt Sgrol ma said she had shouted, which frightened him off. Later, she was afraid to be alone with Zla ba, who always smiled at Aunt Sgrol ma and treated her very nicely. However, Aunt Sgrol ma never looked at Zla ba directly, because if she did, he got the wrong idea. Then, when Aunt Sgrol ma didn't treat Zla ba warmly, his family members treated her badly. They told others how bad Aunt Sgrol ma was because she mistreated her brother-in-law. Many rumors circulated about this.

Once a person marries it's very difficult to divorce, even more so if there are children. The couple generally stays in the marriage, even if they are unhappy with their partner. Consequently, even though Aunt Sgrol ma had a hard life, she didn't dare try anything to change the situation.

Eventually, Zla ba's friend helped him find a widow to marry. Everybody wondered if he could manage a home by himself. The widow had a daughter. Zla ba worked as a blacksmith. Most of the time, he invented things. He created things that no one would have thought about in our village, for example, a metal fuel box with two handles on both sides. He never attended school, and no one taught him how to be a blacksmith. Some people said he was a genius and too smart to deal with ordinary, daily life. After he married, his family built a house for him. A year later he and his wife had a son and enjoyed a nice life together.



Aunt Sgrol ma in Nor 'ur Village (August 2011, Tshes bcu lha mo).

SCALDED

I was in fourth grade in 2000. I was twelve years old. Summer vacation starts at the beginning of July and ends on September first, when school starts again and new students enroll in grade one. Early September is also the busiest time for farmers, because they harvest at this time. Farmers with children always wish that harvest time is earlier so their children could help them. It was raining in September that year so people started their harvest late. I only helped my parents for a few days before school started. I had to stop harvest work. Father didn't want me to miss any classes, while Mother preferred that I stay at home and help. I was worried about being absent. During the harvest, farmers are constantly anxious. Once the grain is cut, it must be transported home, or the rain might spoil it if it sits in the fields too long. My family didn't have enough people to harvest quickly. All the harvest work was done by hand.

"Dear, I know it's hard for you to be absent from school, but please, just today. Grandfather can cook, but today your aunts and uncles are helping. If we transport all the grain today, it will be wonderful. If you're afraid of your head teacher, I'll talk to her when I see her," Mother said early in the morning. She left without waiting for my response. I was a heavy sleeper. When I heard what Mother had said, my heart beat fast, just like something very terrible was about to happen. I wondered why Father would accept this, given his insistence that I should not be absent from classes.

"Do you really want Lha mo to miss her classes today?" Father said as I walked to the kitchen.

"Yeah, because today we'll be very busy, and Father needs help handling the horses. He can't do that and cook," Mother said.

She looked at me and said, "I know it's hard for you, but it's just one day. I'm not asking for a week."

"OK, I'll ask my friend to explain to my head teacher so that she'll understand why I must be absent," I said.

"Maybe your father can write a letter to your teacher," Mother suggested.

Father wrote a note in Chinese, which helped ease my anxiety. My head teacher was very strict and beat students who disobeyed or lied to her. I was a good student who always passed my exams. My head teacher thought that I was an excellent student, but one day when my exam result hadn't been as good as usual, she took me to her office and scolded me. The most hurtful thing was that she beat my palm with a long, slender stick. It was very painful. When I recall this, I feel the pain again. Afterward, I tried to get the best grades I could. I didn't want to be beaten again.

Although my head teacher was very strict, she was also very responsible. Other teachers didn't care if we did our homework or not. But everybody did my head teacher's homework and most students passed her class. She also noticed that we girls hadn't combed and washed our hair for weeks and months. The boys had snot all over their faces. Their hands were covered with dirt and our clothes were old, dirty, and smelly. She said, "Anyone who is dirty and not dressed neatly will get ten strokes of my cane." After that, she checked every day. If she saw that anybody was dirty, she beat them immediately. This really woke us up. Some students were so afraid that they began wearing their best clothes to school every day.

Our head teacher said, "I'm not asking you to wear new clothes, but you should wash your hair, face, and hands daily. You should also regularly wash your clothes." All of my classmates were scared of her.

Father's sisters and brothers came to help us harvest. I had to prepare food for eleven people. Grandfather helped me chop potatoes and pork in the morning. When I was eight, Mother had started teaching me to do all the chores, so I was already very good at doing such things. I cooked rice first. Before frying the potatoes, I boiled tea. We kept boiled tea in kettles to keep it warm for a longer period of time, which saved fuel. I put the kettle on the floor, and then scooped the tea from the pot and poured it into the kettles. That day, however, I thought of a better way to transfer the tea from the pot to the kettle. I lifted the kettle and leaned it against the edge of the pot, and then poured tea into the kettle. We had two kettles. I filled up one and started on the second. When I was almost done with the second kettle, the pot turned over and landed upside down on my left, bare foot. I wasn't wearing shoes because we liked to go barefoot inside the house. The tea had just boiled and was very hot. I held the kettle in my left hand and didn't drop it, even though my foot was

hurting. I carefully placed the kettle on the floor, but I didn't know what to do about my foot. I limped to the corridor to see if someone could help me. I saw that the bathroom light was on and shouted, "Is anybody in there! I poured boiled tea on my foot!" My voice was high and full of emotion. My foot was not that painful, but I was very upset. Grandfather replied from the bathroom, but I couldn't hear him clearly. I said, "Please, come help me. If something is wrong with my foot, I won't be able to attend school tomorrow."

He came out a few minutes later asking, "Who beat you? Why are you crying?" He was in his late fifties and hard of hearing. We had to speak loudly to him.

"Nobody beat me. I poured tea on my foot," I said, raising my injured foot.

"Oh, *bla ma la*! Why weren't you wearing your shoes? I thought someone beat you. I'm so sorry. Are you all right? I have an idea. It's going to be painful for a little bit, but please bear it. I'm sure I can fix this, otherwise, you'll get an infection.

He scooped a big bowl of sour liquid from our pot of pickled vegetables and poured it on my foot. It was very painful.

"I know it's painful but at least it won't get infected. I'll cover it with a soft cloth," Grandfather said.

I said, "I have a soft shirt."

He wrapped my foot in the shirt and tied it with a long string. Then I unrolled my pants leg.

"Is it very painful? I think you should rest in bed," Grandfather suggested.

"I'd like to take a short nap, but we don't have enough water. I should get some," I said. We had to fetch water from a river that is about a kilometer from my home. Sometimes on rainy days we had to drink muddy water.

"I can get water but, right now, I must stay here and fry the potatoes. When you have a wound, you shouldn't fry food, or the wound will get infected," Grandfather advised.

"My foot is very painful, and I want to cry. If I take a short nap maybe the pain will be gone when I wake up," I said, and lay down on my parents' bed.

"OK, take a nap and then we'll see how you feel," Grandfather said, and then he took the pair of big buckets, and set out to get water.

I felt miserable. I worried about school. I thought, "If my foot

turns bad, I'll have to be absent for more than a day. How will I explain that to the teacher? Will it affect my grades?" Finally, I fell asleep.

"Lha mo, I'm frying the potatoes, so don't come in this room," Grandfather said.

The first thing I realized was that the pain had gone. "The pain has gone. My foot feels normal," I said, and gave Grandfather a kiss.

"Great! I was thinking of taking you to the doctor this afternoon," Grandfather said.

"I don't need or believe in doctors," I said. I had never liked doctors. When I disobeyed Mother, she always threatened, "If you behave like this, I'll take you to the doctor, and he'll give you an injection."

While Grandfather fried potatoes, I stayed outside the kitchen to avoid the odor of fried food. I saw Father come down from the roof. He smiled and said, "How are you doing? It's almost twelve, nearly lunch time. I hope you cooked a delicious meal for our lunch."

I silently followed him into the kitchen, not saying anything about what had happened.

"I told you not to come in while I'm frying potatoes. Your wound will get infected," Grandfather said without looking at us.

"What wound?" Father inquired.

"She poured hot tea on her foot," Grandfather said.

"Let me see," Father demanded.

"We wrapped it up. It's a small thing. Now I don't feel any discomfort," I said.

"Are you sure you are all right?" Father said.

"Yeah! I'm sure," I replied, pouring him a cup of tea.

"Well, if you really are fine, can you come up to the roof and help me. Your grandfather was helping me, but then he went to the bathroom and never showed up again. I thought something was wrong with *him*," Father said.

"Sure," I said, and went to the corridor to put on my white work shoes.

After Father finished his tea, we went up to the roof where we kept our barley until it was dry enough to thresh. Brother and three of my uncles went with horses to the fields to get the barley. Mother and my aunts piled up the barley and beans, ready for my uncles and Brother to pack them on the horses.

"Let's have lunch!" Grandfather called from downstairs.

"When they come, I'll tell them," Father said. He then took a cigarette from his pocket, lit it, and rested on the barley.

"If I don't need to help you, I'm going downstairs to help Grandfather get ready for lunch," I said.

"OK, we'll come soon, but your mother and aunts probably won't come home for lunch, so pack their food," Father said.

"I went to the kitchen and packed food for Mother and my aunts. Then I heard steps on the roof, and Grandfather and I got the lunch ready. Everybody looked very serious, maybe because they were tired.

"Lha mo, after our lunch, come help me with the horses," said my youngest uncle.

"I'll help you. She just poured tea on her foot. I don't think she can do it," Grandfather said.

I thought they would comfort me or ask about my foot, but none of them did. I was disappointed.

After lunch, as I washed the dishes and cleaned the rooms, I was cross with everyone and forgot about my foot. Mother returned from the fields looking exhausted. Her face was the same color as her brown shirt.

"I heard you poured tea on your foot. How is it? Let me see it," she said and sat on the ground outside.

"Mother, come in and have lunch first. My foot is fine," I said, and began heating some rice and potatoes for her.

She washed her hands, came into the kitchen, and said, "First let me see your foot, otherwise, I don't think I can have lunch. Your brother told me that you scalded your foot, so I'm worried about you." She then pulled me away from the stove.

"OK! Just a second," I said, and sat on the edge of the bed.

I rolled up my pants. I saw the bandage was wet, and I felt pain.

"Oh, who wrapped it for you?" Mother asked.

"Grandfather," I answered.

"How silly. It must be very painful. I'm sorry," she said.

The bandage had stuck to the wound and I couldn't take it off. It was very red, and there were many thumb-sized blisters. I was shocked, and wanted to cry when I saw that.

"Oh, my *bla ma*! Did your father see this?" asked Mother, tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Mother, don't cry. I'm all right," I said, wiping away her tears.

"Did he see it?" she asked.

"No, I didn't show him. I thought it wasn't serious," I explained. Mother's face turned very red, and she went upstairs to see Father.

"You are a horrible father. Why didn't you check our daughter's foot? Did you see how seriously burned it is?" Mother said angrily.

"I didn't know. I asked to see it, but she wouldn't show me. I thought it was minor and didn't insist," Father explained.

"We must take her to the doctor now. The weather's warm and her wound will get infected soon," Mother said, and returned to the kitchen.

Father followed her. When he saw my foot, his eyes widened. He exclaimed, "Oh Buddha!" and patted my head.

"I can go to the doctor tomorrow. We have helpers today and need to finish our work. Please don't worry about me. Maybe tomorrow it will be all right," I said, but I knew it wouldn't.

"It's already very late. Do we have any medicine to put on the wound?" Father said.

"Shall we go to the doctor early tomorrow morning?" Mother asked.

"That's best," Father said.

"I want you to rest. Your bedroom is cool," Mother said, and made my bed very comfortable. I lay down and Mother put a pillow under my foot.

Father poured water on the shirt that Grandfather had used for a bandage, which made it easier to remove.

I didn't feel great pain then but later, when I wanted to go to the bathroom, my foot was numb, and I couldn't walk. It felt dead. Mother had to carry me to the bathroom.

That night I worried about school, not my foot.

Very early the next morning my parents got ready to take me to the doctor. "Do you want to ride our smaller horse?" Father asked.

"I'd rather walk than ride that horse," I said. I had fallen off horses several times, and I didn't want to ride.

"You can't walk and the doctor isn't near," Father said.

"We'll have to take turns carrying her," Mother said.

I was chubby and heavy. They took turns carrying me to the

County Town. Mother is short and skinny, and carrying me was difficult for her, but she did her best. They joked, "Because you are the first born child, we gave you the best food, that's why you are so heavy."

I felt bad that they had to carry me. "Sorry. I didn't want to ride the horse. I know I'm giving you a very hard time, but I'll repay you by making a lot of money when I grow up."

About ninety minutes later, we reached the hospital. I hate the odor of hospitals. A doctor took us to a small room with a simple bed and said, "OK, lie down."

I saw blood on the bed and thought the doctor was going to operate on me. I whispered to Mother, "Please don't let the doctor operate on me. I'm afraid." I closed my eyes tightly and balled my hands into fists.

Overhearing what I'd said to Mother, the doctor said gently, "You have a wound on your leg. I'm not going to operate on you. You'll feel more comfortable when I put this ointment on your wound."

It was true. He had a yellow substance in a glass bottle. He put it on my foot, which then felt cool. I did feel more comfortable.

"See? I told you. It will take time to heal completely, but this medicine will help you," the doctor said, and gave us a nice smile.

"Do you have other treatments? I want her to get better soon, because she doesn't want to miss school," Father inquired.

"I'm sorry. This is the best way to treat burns. Within ten to fifteen days it will be better and she will be able to walk properly," said the doctor.

"Ten to fifteen days? I'll be punished by my head teacher, and I won't get the best grade," I said tearfully.

"Lha mo, it is what it is. This is reality. I can talk to your head teacher," Mother said.

"She only worries about school," Father said to the doctor.

"I'm sure you're a good student but first, take care of your leg, and then you can study well," said the doctor.

He prepared a big bottle of that yellow ointment for my leg. "Every two hours put some ointment on the leg. If you need more, come see me," the doctor said, handing the bottle to Father.

"What is this yellow stuff made of?" Father asked.

"Fish hearts," answered the doctor.

Father paid twenty-five RMB and then we left. The three of us

went to a shop and bought a pair of big sandals for me. I put them on and walked slowly to my Uncle Rin chen's home, which was in the County Town, where he worked as a blacksmith. Rin chen was Father's brother, and he lived with their mother. Grandmother gave me twenty RMB and Uncle Rin chen gave twenty RMB, too. I was delighted and felt rich. I'd never had my own money before that day. I then bought Brother a pair of rain boots and candy.

I didn't allow Mother and Father to carry me back home. I walked. It was painful but the sandals helped. When we got home, it was very late in the evening. Grandfather and Brother were at home and cooked a big pot of noodles for us.

I showed Brother the new shoes that I had bought for him. "Wow! I hope it will rain tomorrow then, I can wear them!" Brother Blo bzang exclaimed.

"You didn't care about your sister yesterday, but she cares about you a lot. Your grandmother and Uncle Rin chen gave her some money, and she bought rain boots for you that cost seventeen RMB. You should really thank her," Mother said.

"Thanks, Sister. I'm sorry that I made you sad yesterday," Brother said.

Mother carried me to the bathroom after we finished dinner, because my leg was worse after walking home. I was worried it would never heal and I would be permanently handicapped.

Father went to school to talk to my head teacher the next day. She gave permission for me to stay at home until I got better.

I was at home for several days, but my foot did not improve. Father went to consult the doctor, who said, "The medicine is drying the wound. That's why she feels like the veins are tight. She'll be fine after another few days. Be patient."

I was bored to death for the fifteen days I spent at home. Everybody was busy harvesting. My family made food for me and left for work. Mother occasionally came and helped me put on the ointment.

After eleven days, my foot had improved to the point that I could walk more easily. I then made the fire and fed the dogs. After fourteen days my foot was back to normal, but my parents wanted me to wait until the next day to go to school. I realized the doctor knew what he was doing.

I was worried that my head teacher would beat me. "I'm afraid to go to school tomorrow. I won't understand what they have covered

in the classes, and the head teacher may beat me," I said.

"I told your head teacher what happened to you. Don't worry," Father reassured.

The next day I went to school full of fear. "Lha mo, welcome back. I hope you're all right now," my head teacher said.

"I'm fine now," I said.

My head teacher took me to her office. I thought she was going to beat me, but she gave me a chair and said, "Lha mo, have a seat. You were absent for a half month, and we have covered a lot in my class. Come to my office after lunch every day, and I'll help you with your Tibetan. You must ask your Chinese and arithmetic teachers to help you to make up the classes that you missed, too."

Every day, I finished my lunch quickly and went to my head teacher's office. She helped me with the classes that I had missed.

I asked the other two teachers and they helped me, but they were less devoted than my head teacher.

UNCLE RIN CHEN'S BAR BRAWL

Rin chen almost lost his right eye," I heard someone say in the kitchen while I was in bed. I jumped out of bed and ran into the kitchen.

"What's happened?" I said, pulling back the heavy, patched door hanging. Father was still in bed; his back leaned against the wall. Mother was standing by the bed.

"Your trouble-making Uncle Rin chen was beaten by someone in a nightclub, and almost lost his right eye," Father said with a pale face.

"What's a nightclub?" I asked.

"Actually, I have never been to a nightclub, so I can't describe it," Father said.

"I've heard that most young people in the County Town go to nightclubs at night for fun. They drink, dance, sing, and make friends there," said Mother, who had also never been to a nightclub in her life.

"Who beat Uncle?" I asked impatiently.

"I don't know the details, so I must go see him in the hospital. If you want to come, it's OK," Father said. I thought he was very kind to offer me such an opportunity. He rarely took Blog bzang and me to the County Town. We were poor and he couldn't buy the things we clamored for. My parents were uncomfortable when we, for example, saw food in the shops and begged them to buy it. Their cash was so limited that even one RMB was a lot to them.

"I'd love to, thanks," I said happily.

"Are you sure you should take her with you?" Mother said.

"Yeah, I want her to see her Uncle Rin chen in the hospital. He loves our children a lot, so it would be nice if she visited him," Father said.

"Mother, can you comb my hair?" I asked.

"OK, but you haven't washed your hair for days, and it looks very oily," Mother said.

"Just tie it up and wear a hat to cover it. We don't have time

for you to wash it now," Father said.

"Lha mo, you'd better eat something before we leave, or you'll get hungry soon," Father suggested.

"I'm not hungry," I protested. I was so pleased about going to the County Town that my appetite had vanished.

"Lha mo, you know your Father doesn't have money to buy food for you in the County Town, so have some *rtsam pa* now," Mother said.

"I don't want to eat anything, and I won't ask Father to buy anything," I said as Mother combed my hair. She divided my hair into two parts, tied each with a rubber band, and then tied the ends with red thread. My friends used to call me 'small goat' because I always wore my hair like this, which made me look like a goat with two horns of hair.

"My mother is at the hospital with Rin chen, so we'll have lunch there," Father said.

"We have ten *yuan*. Take it with you. You may need to buy lunch for Lha mo. Maybe you should sell some barley, or borrow some money from neighbors to give to your brother," Mother said, because when someone was ill, it is customary for locals to give them money to help them cover their expenses.

"I don't want to sell any barley, because we don't have much left for this year. We can borrow some money if we need to. I will go out and earn some cash soon," Father said.

Farmers can only think about selling barley when they need to raise cash. Barley is farmers' most precious property. Even if we had no money, Father insisted that we not sell any of it. We had very limited farmland for a family of five people and consequently, we didn't have much barley. Sometimes we went hungry.

"OK. While you have breakfast, I'll run over and ask Tshe skyid for fifty *yuan*," Mother said.

"It would be great if they lend us a hundred, then we can buy some salt and oil," Father said.

Mother rushed to our neighbor's home to see what she could borrow while Father ate breakfast. Our rich neighbors were very generous. They always did their best to help us whenever we needed it. Likewise, my parents helped them when we could.

Mother soon returned with a hundred *yuan* and said, "Here it is! Please buy oil and salt if you think they won't be too heavy to carry back."

"Lha mo will be with me and can help carry things," Father said.

We then walked quickly to Brag 'go County Town. There was no public transportation. The track was very rough. My white shoes had turned brown by the time we reached the town's concrete road. It took an hour to reach the hospital, where I saw many people wearing long white coats and white hats. I smelled the familiar, unpleasant odor in the hospital.

Father spoke Chinese to a hospital clerk, asking for Uncle Rin chen's room number - room twenty-eight on the second floor. As we entered his room, I heard Uncle Rin chen groaning in pain. He was lying on a bed. Grandmother was sitting on a chair next to him while a nurse was changing a bandage on Uncle's head.

"Lha mo! You're here to see Uncle Rin chen," Grandmother said and hugged me. I wanted to answer, but then I saw Uncle's Rin chen's wounds, and I was shocked.

"Ah!" I screamed, and ran to Father. I was as terrified as though I had seen a monster. Uncle's face was dark and so swollen I could hardly recognize him. I couldn't breathe normally.

"Don't shout. He's your Uncle Rin chen," Father said, holding me tightly.

"He's your Uncle Rin chen! You love him, right?" Grandmother said.

"Lha mo, I'm your uncle. Are you scared of your uncle?" Uncle Rin chen said.

I was so afraid that I couldn't open my eyes. My mind was full of scary images.

"Lha mo, don't you recognize your uncle's voice?" Grandmother said.

"Lha mo, come here. I have some delicious biscuits for you," Uncle said.

I slowly pried open my eyes, and squinted at him. The first thing that struck me was the white bandage that now covered two-thirds of his face. I could only see one of his eyes.

"Go give your uncle a kiss," Father said, pushing me forward.

I hesitated before apprehensively walking to him, but not too close. He pulled me to him with his right hand and said, "Don't be afraid! I won't eat you." I put my head against his belly and didn't move.

"Mother, please hand me that box of cookies," Uncle said. He

then opened the box and handed them to me. I was extremely fond of cookies, but I was so scared that I showed no interest.

The nurse said something in Chinese that I didn't understand, and pulled my head up to look at Uncle. I was feeling more at ease now and wasn't afraid to look at him.

"Thanks," I said, taking a biscuit.

"What happened to you?" Father asked Uncle.

"When he tried to stop a fight in the nightclub, someone hit him with a beer bottle," Grandmother said.

"Did you know the people who were fighting?" Father enquired.

"I know them, but they aren't my friends," Uncle Rin chen said.

"Why did you so foolishly get between them and earn this reward?" Father said.

"I thought there was no reason for them to fight. I just wanted to stop them from hurting each other," Uncle said.

"I told him not to go to nightclubs. There are only violent people in such places," Grandmother said, tears trickling down her wrinkled cheeks.

"This is the result of disobedience. Whatever we elders say, you disregard as rubbish. You think you're a very great man that never needs to listen to your relatives," Father said, scolding Uncle.

"Brother, I know I made a mistake. Please don't yell at me. I'm full of regret, but it happened. I'll behave myself in the future. I've already had eye surgery. The doctor said my vision will be affected and the shape of my eye will never be normal again. It's obvious and bad for my appearance," Uncle Rin chen said.

"You young people only care about how you look. Boy, you were lucky that the bottle didn't smash your eye entirely and leave you with just one eye," Father said.

"I know. I didn't think that person would hit me. After he injured me, everyone became silent, stopped fighting, and several people brought me to the hospital. The man who injured me begged me not to tell the truth to the police. He said that he would pay all my medical expenses," Uncle Rin chen said.

"Here is fifty *yuan* so you can buy some food while you're in hospital," Father said, passing the money to Grandmother.

"It's OK. We don't expect anything from you," Grandmother said, refusing the money.

"I know you don't expect anything, but I want to leave this here," Father said, and placed the fifty *yuan* on Uncle Rin chen's bed.

"Take it, Grandmother. My neighbor has money," I said as I put another biscuit in my mouth. As soon as they heard what I said, they all laughed loudly.

"Your neighbor gave you the money?" Grandmother asked, laughing.

"Yes, they give us money whenever we need it," I said honestly.

"Yes, we borrow from them. Lha mo, we have to pay it back," Father said.

"Who looked after you last night?" Father said, changing the subject.

"Mother. I asked her to go home, but she didn't," Uncle Rin chen explained.

"Mother, tonight I'll stay and look after Rin chen. You take Lha mo and go home," Father proposed.

"You're not busy tomorrow?" Grandmother asked.

"I am, but I'll leave when you come in the morning," Father said.

"OK," Grandmother agreed.

Uncle Rin chen and I had bread and porridge for lunch while Father and Grandmother had *rtsam pa*. "Why don't you two like bread and porridge?" I asked curiously.

"Because the only food we really like is *rtsam pa*," Father said.

"Most of the time we eat *rtsam pa* at home. I'm not very fond of it," I said.

"Actually because we love your uncle and you, we let you two eat the best food we have," Grandmother explained. I realized again how much they loved and cared for us.

"After lunch, the same nurse came again to change Uncle Rin chen's bandage. I felt my body go numb when the nurse entered the room.

"Shall we leave?" I asked Grandmother, and then I stood behind the door.

"Are you still too afraid to look at me? Don't you have any sympathy?" Uncle Rin chen said.

"I'm not scared of you, but I am scared of your swollen, injured face," I said, refusing to look at him.

"Mother, I think it's time for you to leave. Don't worry, I'll

take good care of him. You don't need to come very early tomorrow morning," Father said.

Grandmother and I said goodbye and went to Uncle Rin chen's blacksmith shop to spend the night.

I slept with Grandmother that night. I had a terrible nightmare in which monsters were chasing me and trying to kill me. I shouted and woke up Grandmother. She comforted me and helped me get back to sleep.

When we got to the hospital the next morning, the nurse had finished changing Uncle Rin chen's bandage. Then Father and I left, because Father had to help Mother with farm work. We went to a shop and bought candies for Brother and me, and oil and salt for our family. I helped Father by carrying his jacket while he carried all the other things that we had purchased.

I had nightmares for days after having seen Uncle Rin chen's face. His wound became a scar that truly affected his life. His cute girlfriend dumped him because his eyes didn't match anymore, and his once handsome face was now disfigured. As he grew older, his scar became larger and more obvious. However, he became better behaved and stopped going to nightclubs.

Today, Uncle Rin chen hasn't married, though he is in his mid-thirties. He thinks that without the right person, there is no point committing to marriage. He makes good money from his blacksmith shop. He took Grandmother to live with him, and he takes very good care of her.

A PUPPY

Woof!" I heard a puppy barking while I was sleeping. I thought it was all in my mind, because had I always wanted a puppy. I pulled my blanket over my head and tried to go back to sleep. However, I could still hear the puppy barking through my heavy, patched blanket. I couldn't believe a real puppy was barking, and the relentless yapping annoyed me. I finally threw my blanket wildly on the floor and planned to run to the kitchen, which is where my parents slept. At that time, Father had gone to dig for gold with some Chinese people in a faraway place. He wouldn't return for months. While Father was away, my brother, Blo bzang, slept with Mother. I thought maybe Blo bzang was yapping like a puppy.

I liked to roll up in my warm blanket when I didn't need to go to school early in the morning. Noises that disturbed my sleep drove me mad. I thrust my head through a tear in the door curtain, just in time to see a big hand lift something from the floor and put it on the bed. Then I heard a puppy yap. I knew the hand didn't belong to Mother, because she was making the fire, and Blo bzang was too young to have such big hands. The only possibility was that the owner of the big hands was Father.

"Is Father here?" I asked Mother.

"Why don't you obey me? I told you not to put your head through that tear in the door hanging. Before it wasn't so big, but you've been playing with it, and now look how big it has become," Mother complained, instead of answering my question. I was very curious about the puppy and that big hand. As I stepped into the kitchen, Father raised his head.

"Oh, Buddha! I hope I'm not dreaming!" I exclaimed as I ran to him and hugged him tightly. When he was away for months, I missed him terribly, so his unexpected presence made me burst into tears of joy.

"I thought you would be happy to see me, but it seems I was wrong," Father said.

"I'm *too* happy to see you. These are happy tears," I exclaimed.

"She cries often when she misses you," Mother said.

"I didn't cry, but I really missed you," Father added.

"Then don't leave us again," I said.

"I don't want to, but we need money to buy food," Father explained.

"OK. Can I go with you? I'll be a good girl, and I won't nag you at work," I promised.

"Girl, don't think that your father is living in paradise. They are living in the mountains and sleeping in camps. Well, I don't think you really understand what I'm talking about. One thing is sure – it's very dangerous to dig gold from tunnels," Mother said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Let me explain. We dig huge, underground tunnels. Then we go inside the mountain, dig deeper, carry the earth outside to a stream, and pan for gold. The gold remains in the bottom of the metal pan, because gold is heavier than dirt," Father explained.

"How interesting! If I go there, can I dig with you?" I asked.

"Don't torment your father. Do you know what time he got home?" Mother said.

"No," I said.

"This morning at five, and it was raining," Mother said.

"OK. A puppy's bark woke me up. I thought I was dreaming, but I bet it's neither a dream nor my imagination, because I can see something moving in your bed," I said calmly.

"I wanted to surprise you, but the puppy barks a lot," Father said sheepishly, pulling up his blanket to reveal an adorable white puppy. I was overjoyed. I picked it up, and hugged and patted it.

"Father, my dream has come true," I said.

"No, your dream is to study hard because no one in our family is educated. I put all my hopes on you because I'm middle-aged, and I had no opportunity to get an education. I want to ensure that you and your brother will transform our family's condition. I don't want our children to follow our example. Your mother and I will make every effort to help you two have lives that are better than ours. It's very hard to compete in this society without education," Father said.

"You remind me of that often. I was first in my class and earned a prize as well," I said proudly.

"My daughter is the best," Father complimented.

"The prize included twenty *yuan*, which we used to buy shoes for her and her brother," Mother said.

"Good girl. I'll buy some new clothes for you two tomorrow," Father said.

"Are you going to the County Town tomorrow?" I asked.

"Yes. I must go there to meet my boss, because I didn't get all my salary yet," Father said.

"Will you take us with you?" I asked.

"That's what I mean. This time I earned more income than before, so I can buy new clothes for you," Father clarified.

"Thanks! This afternoon we'll wash our hair and shoes to be ready for tomorrow," I said.

"Good. I'll help you wash the puppy, too, because it has lice," Father said.

"Why do puppies have lice? They don't wear clothes like we do?" I asked. I thought only people had lice, because my parents frequently told us to change our clothes to avoid lice.

"Because their fur is like clothes and dirt also encourages lice," Father explained.

"Blo bzang, guess who's here? Guess what he brought with him?" I said. I took the puppy to my brother. He usually slept with Mother while Father wasn't there, but that night when Father came home, they moved Blo bzang to his own bedroom.

He rubbed his eyes and raised his head a little. I held the puppy in my hands. His eyes opened wide when he saw the puppy.

"Wow! Who brought this lovely puppy?" Blo bzang exclaimed, jumping up from the bed.

"If you want to know who brought this puppy, then follow me," I said, and led him into the kitchen. He knew who was there when he saw somebody sleeping in our parents' bed, because Mother was sweeping the kitchen.

"I remember last night I was sleeping with Mother, but this morning I was in my bed. Now, I know who is here. Father's back home," Blo bzang said, ran to Father, and kissed him over and over again on his mouth, cheeks, and forehead.

"Father, I missed you so much!" Blo bzang exulted, hugging Father and kissing his forehead.

"Oh, my son! I missed you, too," Father said, and pulled him up on the bed.

"Mother said that you married a nomad woman, and wouldn't

return," Blo bzang said.

"Ha! I said that to threaten him, because sometimes he behaves badly," Mother said.

"How could I leave my lovely son and marry another woman? Your mother was just teasing you," Father said.

"I have something else for you," Father said. Mother passed a big dirty, torn bag to Father.

"My friends boiled some eggs for me to eat on the way, but I thought you two love eggs, so I didn't eat them," Father said and then took out a plastic bag full of boiled eggs.

"Oh, I love eggs," Blo bzang said.

Mother peeled the eggs for us, which we ate for breakfast. We rarely had eggs, because we didn't raise chickens, and they were too expensive in the markets. My parents always kept delicious food for us, which made us assume that this was their duty. Sometimes, I even thought that they didn't like to eat such delicious food.

That afternoon, Blo bzang and I washed our hair and shoes while Father helped me wash the puppy in a basin. I was very excited to go to the County Town the next day, but I also didn't want to leave the puppy at home alone.

That night, Blo bzang and I slept together, and the puppy slept between us. We played with it for a long time before going to bed. My parents didn't want the puppy to sleep with us, because they worried that the puppy's lice would jump on us. We used to have lice on our underwear when we didn't wash them regularly. Then my parents picked them off, and threw them in the stable. We didn't kill them, because that would violate our religious principles.

"Children! It's time to get up!" Mother called the next morning. I wanted to continue sleeping, but Blo bzang knew that we were going to the County Town and got up at once.

"Sister, get up! You don't want to go to the County Town?" Blo bzang asked. Then I got up quickly.

"Can we ask for candy today?" Brother asked. Whenever our parents took us to the County Town, they told us not to ask them to buy candy. Then we didn't ask, even though we really wanted to.

"Today, I'll buy you candy and clothes. You don't need to ask," Father said.

"Wow! You are great," Blo bzang enthused. We put on our washed clothes and shoes, because we didn't have new clothes. Villagers wear new clothes when they go to the County Town and on

special days. On other days, they wear old clothes. My parents had few clothes, but they never considered buying clothes for themselves.

"Is Grandfather coming with us?" I asked.

"No, he said he doesn't want to," Mother said.

"Oh, good! I can leave my puppy with him," I said.

"Lha mo, don't hold your puppy so tightly all the time or you'll kill it," Father cautioned. Then he turned to Grandfather and asked, "OK, what do you want me to buy for you?"

"Some dumplings," Grandfather answered.

"OK, sure. We'll buy beef and vegetables and I'll make dumplings for you when I came back," Father said.

"I know he likes watermelon," I said.

"OK, sure. We'll buy watermelon, too," Father added.

That day, Blo bzang and I didn't want to eat *rtsam pa* for breakfast. Blo bzang whispered to me, "Don't eat *rtsam pa*. We can buy Chinese bread in town." Our parents didn't force us to eat *rtsam pa*, because they knew what we wanted.

It started to rain when we reached the County Town. Father told Mother to take us to a small Chinese restaurant to take shelter from the rain, and then he went to meet his boss. After a half hour he returned. His clothes were wet and water was flowing down his head, face, and neck. He looked awful, but his big smile was still there. He took off his coat, and wiped his face with the coat lining.

"I didn't expect to earn this much. I'm glad that we will have more money this year," Father said.

"Are you cold? I think we should go to your brother's home and get some dry clothes," Mother suggested.

"No. I'm OK. My jacket got a little wet, but not on the inside," Father said.

"You'll get sick if you wear wet clothes," I said.

"I know, but this isn't the first time I've been wet. We were often wet at work, but it was impossible to put on dry clothes," Father replied.

"I understand, but you need to look after your health. What would we do if something happened to you?" Mother said.

"Silly! I'm tough. Nothing is going to happen to me," Father reassured.

"Father, after I grow up, I'll take care of all of you, and then you won't be so tired," I said.

"What a wonderful daughter," Father said, giving me a kiss.

We had bread and noodles at the restaurant. I like bread and noodles a lot, but the bread and noodles were less delicious that day, because I realized how hard Father had to work to earn money for us.

After our relatively extravagant meal, my parents took us to the clothing shops. Father held Brother's hand, and Mother held mine as we crossed the road that ran through the County Town. The traffic was chaotic – the drivers followed no rules.

We avoided shops that looked fancy, because we knew we couldn't afford what they sold. Instead, we shopped in small stores that sold inexpensive goods. My parents bought a red suit and a pair of rubber sandals for me and a blue suit and a pair of sport shoes for Blo bzang. We listened to our parents and never chose things ourselves.

Afterward, we went to the vegetable market to buy beef and vegetables. While Father and Blo bzang were at the meat shop, Mother and I went to the fruit shop. We bought a small watermelon and some apples. Then we went to the Brag 'go Monastery and gave two *yuan* to a monk to chant scriptures on behalf of our family. There are many scriptures and the ones chanted depend on what the person wants the monks to chant. For instance, when a person is going away, monks chant a scripture that ensures good luck for the person.

At about five in the afternoon, we rushed home. Every afternoon at around six, the village herdsman drove our livestock back to our home. Someone from each family had to be there to take their livestock. If livestock were missing, we had to inform the herdsman, and he would go look for it. We knew that it was unlikely that Grandfather could deal with both home chores and our livestock.

When we got home the livestock were not yet there. Father and Brother went to get the livestock, and I helped Mother wash the vegetables. Grandfather was very good at making dumplings, so the three of us cooked dinner together. When we had dinner, I wanted to give meat to the puppy, but Father didn't agree. He said the puppy would vomit and die if it ate oily food. After dinner we had watermelon and then cookies. I wished that my family could always be together and enjoy such nice food.

A FIGHT WITH A BOY

When I was in grade six, I was fifteen years old. I generally enjoyed my elementary school experience, except for some maltreatment from one boy. A group of boys frequently bothered other students. These troublemakers didn't do well in school, and disappointed their teachers and parents. They frequently played hooky together. Their parents thought they were at school and the teachers thought that they were at home. They went to Brag 'go County Town to steal chickens and anything else that they could sell for cash.

"Lha mo, do your teachers give you much homework?" asked Mother one Sunday morning.

"Not that much, but..." I answered.

"What? Tell me now!" Mother said.

"I have a secret that I've never told you," I said.

"What secret? Tell me now," Mother said curiously.

"I didn't want you to worry, so I didn't tell you, but since I will graduate soon, I'll tell you now," I said.

Father came home from herding at this time and asked, "Have you finished your homework?" when he saw I was with my books.

"She is going to tell me a secret," Mother said.

"Oh! May I listen?" Father said.

"Yeah! Come in," I said.

"While you tell us your secret, I'll eat something. I'm starving," Father said.

Mother brought him butter and his bowl. I heated the tea.

"Do you want *rtsam pa*?" Father asked.

"No. Mother and I just had some potatoes at Aunt Sgrol ma's," I answered.

"Lha mo, tell us your secret now. I'm impatient," Mother said.

"Last time I told you about a group of boys who always make trouble," I said.

"We've heard a lot about these boys," Father said.

"Some are from my class. They always bully the girls," I said.

"Oh! Why didn't you tell us earlier," Father said.

"I have to do one of the boys' homework as well as doing mine. He threatens me and he beat me once when I didn't do his homework," I said.

"When did it happen?" Mother asked.

"Why didn't you tell me? I will beat him," Father said angrily.

"I thought if I told you these things, you would go to school and yell at the teachers. Some parents do that, and I didn't want such things to happen in my case. I want to be a good student and favorably impress my teachers," I said.

"How silly! I know you like a peaceful life, but those boys are not giving you peace. Your teachers are responsible for that," Father said.

"Our teachers really tried. One day the principal beat one of the boys, and the next day his father came to the school and argued with the principal. He told him that he doesn't have the authority to beat his son. The principal said, 'Your son is so perfect that no one needs to beat him. I bet he is like you.' Afterwards, our teachers didn't care much about the students who escaped from class," I explained.

"Yes. That boy's father should understand that his son is doing poorly in school, and always making trouble," Mother added.

"If you had told me earlier, I would have found that boy and threatened him, but I would not have beaten him. You know that I don't like to beat children," Father said.

"Lha mo, I know you are a good girl, but don't let others bully you," Mother urged.

"So, do you still do his homework?" Father asked.

"Yes, doing double homework helps me learn more. It's not completely a bad thing," I said.

"When did you start helping him?" Mother asked.

"Since I was in fourth grade. I'm a good student, that's why he wants my help," I said.

"Don't let others treat you this way. Don't let others bully you," Father said.

"You must learn to take care of yourself, otherwise, next year when you go to middle school we will worry. You'll come home only once each semester," Mother said.

"You should be a good girl, but don't let others bully you. At least you should tell your parents and let them figure it out for you," Father said.

"If you let others bully you and keep it a secret, then I don't want you to attend the Tibetan Middle School. To get there, you have to walk for an hour and then take a bus for at least another hour. I think it's better for you to stay in Brag 'go County Town Middle School. It's closer to home – only an hour's walk from here - so you could come home every weekend, and we could also visit you," Father said.

"Please! You know that my Tibetan is better than other subjects. If I go to the Tibetan Middle School, I can study other subjects in Tibetan. I can take care of myself. I promise," I pleaded.

"We'll see," Mother said.

Grandfather took Blo bzang to visit his elder sister in a distant village. Only my parents and I were at home that night. We cooked noodles for dinner, and then Mother baked bread for me to take to school. I was very happy that I didn't need to bring *rtsam pa* for lunch. After supper, Mother packed my lunch, and then we went to bed.

As I lay in bed, I thought about what my parents had said when I told them my secret. I thought, "I should fight back when Bsam 'grub bullies me. I'm going to graduate soon, and I should prove that I'm not a corpse. "

I went to school as usual the next day. When I reached my classroom, I gave Bsam 'grub his homework. He didn't thank me. He jerked the notebook from my hand as though I were his slave. Then our teacher came, and I returned to my seat.

"Lha mo. Where are you going without taking my notebooks with you?" Bsam 'grub said after our last class.

"I'm not your servant, and I'm not going to help you anymore," I said bravely.

"Ha! How dare you say such a thing to me! Aren't you afraid of me?" Bsam 'grub said, his face covered with snot.

"I've never been afraid of you, but I didn't want to trouble my parents," I retorted.

"You're such a good girl, aren't you. Do you want to fight me?" Bsam 'grub challenged.

"I don't want to, but I'm not going to do your homework again," I declared and turned away.

"Girl! If you are so brave, then wait for me at the school gate," Bsam 'grub ordered.

I said nothing and left the classroom. When I was almost at

the school gate he ran up and said, "Follow me."

I said, "I don't have time to follow you. My friends are waiting for me, and I must go home and finish my homework," and kept walking. At that time, students were busy going home. Soon all the students were gone from the campus.

Bsam 'grub suddenly jerked my right arm hard and kicked me in the bottom. I was so angry that I could have eaten him. I thought it was time to take revenge, whirled around, and started kicking him back. Once he let go of my hand, I pulled it back and slapped his face with all my might.

"Oh, Buddha!" Bsam 'grub cried, and used both hands to cover his eyes.

"This is the first gift," I said and kicked his leg.

"Buddha!" he swore and grabbed my pigtails. He was taller than me, so it was easy for him to get at my head. He pushed my head down so I could only see his feet. As I looked at his feet an idea popped into my mind. I stomped his right foot as hard as I could. He fell to the ground, but he still didn't let go of my hair. I fell on top of him. I couldn't raise my head, so I bit his chest. He turned over, and I fell under him. When he wanted to slap me, I raised my feet and kicked him repeatedly. One kick hit his kidney, and he cried out and doubled over. While he was bent over like that, I pulled on his leg and he fell to the ground. Then I sat on top of him and scratched his face.

"Stop," I heard someone yelling.

"How dare you two fight on campus!" somebody exclaimed.

I raised my head and looked. It was our principal. I was not afraid of him, so I continued to scratch Bsam 'grub's face.

"Lha mo, I said stop. Don't you hear me?" the principal shouted, and lifted me off of Bsam 'grub.

"Everybody else is at home now. What's wrong with you two, especially you Lha mo? You are a girl!" the principal said.

"He has bullied me for ages, so I wanted revenge before graduation," I replied.

"No. She kicked me first," Bsam 'grub said and got up.

"I'm sure you would never start a fight, because you are always such a good boy," the principal said with a big smile.

Both of us stood there with our heads down. When I heard what the principal said, I raised my head and looked at Bsam 'grub. I saw that his nose was bleeding, and there were several scratches on his face. I felt sympathy at that point, but then I discovered that my

pigtails were loose. I looked around, and I saw a handful of hair was on the ground near Bsam 'grub. My sympathy for him evaporated, and my anger rose.

"I know that I'm a girl, but what's wrong with being a girl?" I said. Now, I was not just angry at Bsam 'grub, but also with the principal.

"I don't have time to punish you two today. Go home now, and tomorrow noon come to me," the principal said.

"Why do you need to punish me? He bullies me, I didn't bully him," I said.

"I know that, but you know that his parents don't want me to beat their son because their son is so good," the principal said.

Bsam 'grub kept his head down and said nothing.

"Now, you two are going to graduate within a month. I think it's time for you two to review, or worry about your finals, and not fight. Your graduation is approaching, so I'm not going to punish you, but you must promise that you two will get good grades. Otherwise I'll be really angry. I know that Lha mo will get good grades because she always does. However, Bsam 'grub, you have made trouble since you enrolled in this school. How do you feel now? What have you accomplished so far?" the principal said.

"Father said I don't need to go to middle school, so I don't need to worry about my finals," Bsam 'grub said.

"You think the government will allow that?" the principal said.

"I've learned nothing so far, so I don't think I'll be going to middle school, where I would only kill time," Bsam 'grub said.

"You have ruined your life, Bsam 'grub. Lha mo, you want to attend the Tibetan Middle School, so you must work hard to get the grades they require. They don't want bad students," the principal warned.

"I'm confident," I said.

"Good," the principal said.

"It's late. I think you should let us go home. My parents will worry about me," I said.

"OK, go home," the principal said, and walked away.

Bsam 'grub and I said nothing to each other. His home was near the school, while mine was far away. We lived in opposite directions, too. He took the lower road while I took the upper road from our school gate. I didn't even look at him.

It was almost dark, so I ran home. Of course, my friends were

not there waiting for me, and Blo bzang had not come to school that day. No one at all was waiting for me.

"Look at you! What happened?" Mother said when I entered the gate.

I had forgotten to retie my pigtails. My hair was very messy and all over my face. I said, "I fought Bsam 'grub. That's why I came home so late."

"You fought with him? He hit you?" Mother cried angrily.

"Yes," I said and told her everything.

"Last night, you seemed scared of him when you told us your secret. Did he beat you?" Father asked.

"Neither of us won. I think we beat each other equally," I said, I didn't give more information, though they wanted to know more about it.

Grandfather and Blo bzang had returned by this time. I didn't tell them that I had lost a handful of hair because I didn't want them to hate Bsam 'grub. I thought that neither of us had won because he had pulled out some of my hair, and I had scratched his face and made his nose bleed. However, afterwards, he never bullied me again, so I guess in some ways I won that day.

At our graduation ceremony, Bsam 'grub congratulated me because the Tibetan Middle School accepted me. All my classmates wanted to attend the Tibetan Middle School, but it accepted only two of us. Bsam 'grub apologized. I said I was sorry for scratching his face. After graduation, he didn't attend middle school. Instead, his father taught him to be a carpenter.



The Tibetan Middle School in Tre hor Town, Brag 'go County (15 June 2013, Bsod nams sgrol ma).



MUSHROOMS AND A GHOST

Lha mo, do you want to come to collect mushrooms with me?" my friend and neighbor, Lha s gron, asked.

"I'll ask Mother for permission," I said, and ran home.

"Mother, Lha sgron is going to collect mushrooms. May I go with her?" I pleaded.

"Of course you may," Mother replied.

"I want to go. If I find some mushrooms, I'll sell them in the County Town," I said.

"Yeah! Anyway, the weather today is not good for digging potatoes," Mother said.

It was harvest time. We had just finished harvesting grains, but the potatoes were still in the ground because it had been raining for days.

"Mother, while I'm looking for my basket, please pack some food for me," I said.

"We don't have any food that you can take, except *rtsam pa* and boiled potatoes. I'll pack those," Mother replied.

"Please pack some spice and salt, too," I said.

I grabbed my basket from behind the kitchen wall as Mother packed food. Then I put on old clothes, because our clothes always got dirty when we went to the forest. The only shoes I had were an old pair with torn soles.

"Don't stay late or we'll worry," Mother reminded as I was leaving.

"We'll be back before sunset," I assured.

"Don't go very far away and stay near Lha sgron," Mother cautioned.

"Mother, we aren't children. Don't worry. It's not like we will do anything dangerous," I said.

"I know, but that's called parents' love," she explained.

I put the packed food in my basket and went to Lha sgron's home. Our homes were attached, so it was very easy to get there. She was ready to go. We left immediately.

"We had some leftover rice from last night, so I brought it for our lunch," Lha sgron said.

"Good! I've got potatoes and *rtsam pa*," I said.

It took about an hour of fast walking from our village to reach the biggest forest. We talked about many things. Time flew by. We didn't feel tired. When we got to the forest we rested, and saw other groups of people entering the forest.

"That group is from Brag 'go Village. They've come to collect for a day. Tomorrow, they'll go to the County Town and sell them," Lha sgron said.

"I think our baskets may be full by the time we leave to go home," I said.

"I hope so, but it will be hard to pick so many so quickly," Lha sgron said.

"I want to earn enough to buy a new pair of shoes because these shoes' soles are worn out. I'm too shy to lift my feet because I'm afraid others will see my soles," I said, lifting one foot and showing Lha sgron.

"My uncle always buys shoes for me, so I don't need to worry about that. He has a lot of money, plus my father is a carpenter," Lha sgron explained.

"What will you do with the money you earn today?" I asked.

"I'm going to save it because it's good to have my own money," Lha sgron said.

"Why don't we separate now and look in different places?" I suggested.

"OK. Don't go too far away, otherwise, we won't find each other," Lha sgron cautioned.

"I'll call you every few minutes," I promised.

The forest was dense, wide, and steep. It was hard to walk in the forest because the ground was covered in broken branches that pricked my feet. Then I had an idea to use a walking stick, which helped.

"Lha mo, are you all right?" Lha sgron called.

"Fine. Have you found any?" I asked.

"Not yet, but I'm collecting some mushrooms that can't be sold because my family likes to eat them," Lha sgron said.

We were silent for a time. I was focused on looking for mushrooms, because selling them would solve my shoe problem. The mushrooms I was looking for were white with long, thick roots. When

it rains, they grow very fast, and in clumps. After they have grown for a time, they resemble umbrellas. The small, fresh ones are the most valuable." Lha mo, I found a bunch worth about ten *yuan*," Lha sgron yelled.

"Great," I said, turning my head toward her. Then I saw a cluster of mushrooms looking at me, which made me happy. I looked for a sharp stick to dig the mushrooms from the root.

"Lha sgron, I found a bunch, too. Now, I think my dream will come true. Maybe I'll buy a pair of new shoes tomorrow," I said

I put the mushrooms in my basket and held the food in my hand, in fear it would damage the mushrooms.

"Lha mo, where are you? I'm hungry!" Lha sgron shouted a bit later.

I hadn't felt hungry or tired because I had been totally focused on looking for mushrooms, but when I stopped and thought about it, I realized I was also hungry.

"Shall we have lunch?" I suggested.

"Yeah, I'll come to you," Lha sgron said, and came over. We sat under a huge tree. We ate her rice mixed with my spices, and then ate my *rtsam pa* and potatoes. We were hungrier than we had imagined, but we had forgotten to bring water, so even though we were famished, it was hard to finish all the dry food. We collected some wild strawberries instead of going down to the valley, getting water, and then climbing back again.

"We've been here for several hours, we just didn't realize it," Lha sgron said.

"Mother said to come back early, so we should leave before sunset," I said.

"Yes, otherwise, Father will scold me. Maybe we should look for another hour, and then go home," Lha sgron said.

"How many mushrooms have you collected?" I asked.

"I found two big clumps," Lha sgron said.

"I've found four clumps, and they were big, too! I think I might also be able to buy a pair of shoes for my brother," I said.

"Great! I thought about giving you one of my old pairs of shoes. I mean, if you want them," Lha sgron said.

"Of course I want them, but what would your parents say?" I said.

"I have several pairs of shoes, so I don't think they'll notice," Lha sgron said.

"Thanks," I said.

We started searching again. My basket was almost full, so I put some mushrooms in the plastic bag Mother had packed food in. We didn't have a watch, but we could see the sun was setting. We knew it was time to head home.

I was tired, sat under a tree, turned my head, and saw another clump of mushrooms. I shouted in amazement to Lha sgron and then slowly dug my clump up.

"I think it's time to go home," Lha sgron said, joining me. She continued, "I'm so excited about tomorrow. We'll go to the County Town, and I'll have my own money to buy candy, too." She helped me put some of my mushrooms in another plastic bag.

"Yeah, I'm also excited. Mother is going to be surprised at how many mushrooms I got," I said.

"You don't have enough room for these remaining mushrooms. I'll help you carry them," Lha sgron offered, taking her basket from her back and adding my mushrooms.

She helped me put my basket on my back and handed me the plastic bag. We could no longer see the sun as we walked down the mountain. Suddenly, we heard a sound echoing in the valley.

"What was that?" Lha sgron exclaimed, clutching my arm tightly. We stopped and stood there, our hearts pounding.

"Ghost!" I whispered uneasily.

"Don't mention that word!" squealed Lha sgron, beating my shoulders with her fists.

"Stop beating me. Whatever it is we must move quickly, otherwise it will approach us," I said, tugging her arm.

Then we walked quickly, but the mountain was very steep and hard for us to clamber down. Our baskets were heavy, and my feet hurt, as they poked out from my worn-out soles. The frightening sound was now much closer. My legs shook and I couldn't walk steadily, but I didn't mention this to Lha sgron because she was hard to deal with once she was scared.

"That sound is coming nearer," shouted Lha sgron. She began crying.

"Be quiet, or it will find us," I whispered, which made Lha sgron more anxious. I could see her body shaking so badly that she couldn't walk properly.

"Once we get out of the forest, we'll be safe," I reassured.

The sound stopped after some time. We rested. "I think if we

met that thing, we would die today," Lha sgron said, clutching the amulet that she wore around her neck.

"Shall we throw away our mushrooms and baskets and run?" Lha sgron suggested.

"No. It'll be all right," I replied, because I was eager to sell the mushrooms and buy shoes.

The sound came again. We screamed and ran, and Lha sgron yelled at me. My mind was full of frightening images. I thought a very disgusting, huge thing was about to devour us. When we had nearly reached the edge of the forest, Lha sgron slipped. Her basket struck a boulder and her mushrooms flew everywhere. Some rolled away, and some were stopped by bushes. We had no time to care about the mushrooms. I went back and gave her my hand. She was in such a state of shock that she was utterly silent. I picked up the mushrooms I could see, threw them into her basket, and put the basket on her back again.

"Lha sgron, let's go. There is no time to think," I said, tugging her arm.

Finally, we got out of the forest. The sound was louder than ever. Lha sgron said, "I think we are going in the wrong direction. Maybe we are running toward that thing."

This made me very worried. We stopped and listened. It was very loud and noisy. It seemed an old lady with a man's voice was shouting at us. I was sad because I thought I was going to die and would never see my family members again. Lha sgron pulled my coat, and her other hand pointed to the mountain. When I raised my head, I saw a tall, huge white thing moving down the other side of the mountain. I knew it wasn't a yak or any other animal that I recognized, because it talked like a person. It seemed very dangerous.

"I think the sound is from that thing. Oh, my Buddha, I think it's approaching us. When we reach the valley bottom it will be there and will eat us in a second," Lha sgron said. I saw tears in her eyes. I thought it was the end of our lives.

"OK, let's not go down now. Let's go straight," I urged, and started walking. Lha sgron followed.

We kept looking back and noticed that the thing moved very slowly. However, we were not positive that the sound was coming from it. We could sense that the sound was very near us. It was getting darker, and we could no longer see much of anything. It was autumn, and the herders who usually lived there had moved to other

pastures.

Finally, we reached the valley floor, and the going was easier. We were quiet and our steps were quicker. We reached the river, took off our baskets, knelt, and drank water as though we hadn't drunk water for days. We relaxed by lying on the grass after quenching our thirst.

"This isn't the right time to relax. We should go home or that thing will find us," Lha sgron panted.

"I think it's gone, but it is better to go home," I said.

When I stood up, I realized that my shoes were in tatters. I hadn't realized this before.

"I have to walk barefoot," I said, and took off my shoes.

"I have an idea," Lha sgron said, and sat on a stone nearby and removed her shoes.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm wearing a pair of thick socks. You can wear them. It's better than going barefoot," Lha sgron said, handing me her socks. I put them on, and found that she was right – it was better. However, the ground was very rough, and the socks were soon torn.

"Oh, my Buddha, I think that thing is there," Lha sgron suddenly shouted and stopped walking.

"What do you see?" I asked.

"Look. Something is moving," she said, pointing to her right. We could see our village. The road was between trees the famers had planted for fences. I saw something moving.

"Oh, Rin po che, I thought we were out of danger, but we can't elude it," I said, closing my eyes. We held each other's hands, not knowing what else to do. "We don't hear that sound now. Maybe that isn't the thing we saw before," I comforted Lha sgron.

"*Chong!*"⁷ Lha sgron shouted.

"Do you think it's a horse?" I said.

Lha sgron shouted several times, and then it started moving and gradually it moved away. "I think it's a horse," Lha sgron said.

"OK, it's time to scoot home," I said. I forgot that I was barefoot. I was walking very fast. Eventually, we got to another river that was our village drinking water source. We didn't take time to go to the wooden bridge; we just waded across. The water was cold and flowed quickly. As we were approaching our village, we heard people

⁷ A vocable shouted when driving livestock in a particular direction.

talking about a horse. We then realized that our 'monster' was actually a horse. When we met the villagers, we told them that we had seen a horse on our way.

"Finally, we're at home," Lha sgron said, sighing in relief.

"Yeah, I thought we were going to die," I said.

"I'm so sorry that, when I slipped, I scattered our mushrooms. You can take the mushrooms in my basket. I don't think I have enough to sell," Lha sgron said.

"I can give you half of my mushrooms, and then tomorrow we both can go to the County Town," I suggested.

"No, you have to buy shoes," Lha sgron said.

"I'm sure I'll have enough to buy a pair of shoes," I said, and gave her half my basket of mushrooms. We approached her home first. I said goodbye and went home.

"Lha mo, are you there?" Grandfather said as I was locking our stable gate.

"Yes, it's me," I answered.

"I was so worried about you," Grandfather said, taking the basket from my back.

"You two girls shouldn't go out by yourselves or, if you do, you should come home earlier," Grandfather admonished.

"Have you ever heard about a ghost or big animal in the forest?" I asked.

"Of course – that's why we were worried," Grandfather said.

"Oh, she's finally back," Mother exclaimed.

"I was thinking of coming to look for you," Father added.

"Many people have heard a strange sound in that valley in the late afternoon," Blo bzang said.

"What makes that sound?" I asked.

"We don't know, but we used to hear that sound when we were young. It is frightening," Father said.

"Today, we heard it and were almost scared to death," I said.

"Please never go there again," Mother said.

"We saw a big, fat, white thing moving on the other side of the mountain," I said.

"What kind of thing?" Blo bzang said.

"I don't know. We're also not sure if that thing was making the sound or not," I said.

"Since long ago, people have said there is a ghost in that valley, but no one has seen it. Nobody really knows what makes that

sound, "Father said.

"Without adult company, you should never go there alone. Now you know what's there," Grandfather warned.

"Did you get some mushrooms we can fry with beef?" Father said.

"I only got mushrooms to sell," I said.

"How many kilograms do you think you have?" Mother said.

"Let's see," I said, and then went to get my basket.

When I poured all the mushrooms on the floor, I noticed that most mushrooms were broken, especially the ones at the very bottom. Mother and I selected the good ones and put them on our scale. There was only a half kilogram that could be sold. The rest were too badly damaged.

"Oh, my whole day was wasted," I said disappointedly.

"Sister, look at these," Blo bzang said, handing me a pair of white fabric shoes.

"I was planning to sell my mushrooms and buy shoes for us, but my mushrooms are damaged," I said.

"Girl, you are too eager to earn money. Remember, safety is very important. I know you are trying your best, but we adults can handle these things," Father said.

"Where are your shoes?" Mother asked curiously.

"They fell to pieces," I said.

"Don't tell me you came home barefoot," Mother gasped.

"I did. Lha sgron gave me her socks, which helped a lot," I said.

"My poor daughter," Father said.

"Don't sell those mushrooms, they're not worth it," Father said. He then washed some and fried them with beef.

"You now have new shoes, so you don't need to worry," Mother said.

"Wash your feet before you go to bed. Are your soles painful?" Grandfather asked.

"No, but they're a bit tender," I said.

We had dinner. I was so tired that I excused myself and went to bed early. That night I had nightmares because of the scary sound we had heard in the valley.

The next morning, I went to Lha sgron's home and told her that I was not going to town. Her mother also didn't want us to go. When I was returning home, Lha sgron called and came after me

holding a pair of shoes.

"I promised to give you a pair of shoes. Mother agreed I could give these to you," Lha sgron said.

"Thanks. When I got home last night, Father gave me a pair of new shoes. Isn't that amazing?" I said.

"That's nice. You can wear mine to work and the new ones at other times," Lha sgron suggested.

"Last night was terrible. I've never been that scared in my life," I said.

"Father said there is a ghost in that valley. He's heard that sound before," Lha sgron said.

"My parents and Grandfather said the same, but no one has actually seen it. Maybe that sound is from some sort of animal," I said.

"I'll never go back there again," Lha sgron said.

"Me neither. I was terrified," I said, thanked her for the shoes, and went home.

No one could figure out where those sounds come from, but most of our villagers believe there is a ghost there. Lha sgron and I believe that sound comes from a white animal, not a ghost.

VISITING A NOMAD COUPLE

After harvest, villagers collect yak dung, which is an important fuel for my community. Several forests are nearby, but the government forbids cutting trees. Every household owns yaks, but not enough to supply the amount of fuel needed to keep houses warm in winter and for cooking. Fortunately, many herders drive their livestock near our village in the summer. After they leave with their yaks, we go to the pastures to collect the dung.

"Today, I'm going to visit my nomad friend, and ask to collect yak dung in their pasture. I need your help," Mother said.

"But the nomads haven't left yet," I reminded her.

"I know, but I want to visit and ask for permission to collect their yak dung," Mother said.

"OK. I'd love to go with you, but I've heard nomads have many giant dogs," I said.

"I've been to their home before. There aren't many dogs," Mother assured me.

"OK! When shall we leave?" I asked.

"I'll get some potatoes and cabbages to take with us, and then I'll be ready," Mother said.

"Shall we bring our baskets?" I asked.

"I'll carry one with potatoes and cabbage. You don't need one," Mother said.

"I think you're afraid to go alone and want me to keep you company," I said.

"I'm not afraid, but having a companion is nicer than being alone," Mother replied.

That was my first time to visit a yak hair tent, so I was very curious. I had wondered how nomads lived in their tents. I had had a lot of butter, milk, yogurt, cheese, and beef. I also had heard that nomads sleep near their newborn yak calves and lambs. The most exciting thing was that nomads have many nice horses.

"What do nomads eat?" I asked.

"They mainly eat *rtsam pa*, butter, yogurt, cheese, beef, and bread," Mother answered.

"Where do they grow barley?" I asked.

"They sell their animal products and buy barley or *rtsam pa* from farmers," Mother said.

"Are their black tents made from yak skin?" I asked.

"Ha!" Mother laughed, and patted my head gently. "Their tents are made from yak hair. It takes months to weave the cloth."

"What's it like inside the tent?" I asked.

"Big, and dark," Mother said.

"Do they have TV?" I asked.

"They don't have electricity," Mother said.

"What do they do in the evening?" I asked.

"They have butter lamps," Mother continued.

"Butter lamps?" I exclaimed.

"Not exactly butter. Only a few people make lamps from butter. They probably buy kerosene for lamps," Mother said uncertainly.

We talked all the way to Mother's friend's home. The time flew by. As we were approaching the pasture, I saw five black tents. I heard a dog barking, and I saw flocks of sheep on the nearby mountains, yaks climbing a mountain in a ragged line, clusters of yak calves and lambs here and there, a tall mountain covered with snow, and smoke churning into the sky from the tents. It was all very impressive.

While approaching a small river, we met a woman fetching water. She had a wooden bucket and a silver scoop. Her long dark hair was in many thin braids. I saw her long, wide, green sash touch the ground as she bent down.

"Hello, Mtsho mo!" greeted Mother loudly.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"She's my friend," Mother said.

"Ye shes! My husband told me you would come today. We were expecting you," Mtsho mo said.

"Yes, I met your husband in the County Town yesterday," Mother answered.

"It's so nice to see you again," Mtsho mo said.

"This is Lha mo, my daughter. This is her first visit to a herding place, so she was asking me lots of questions about herders on the way," Mother said.

"Oh, my *bla ma*, you have a big daughter," Mtsho mo said.

"Yeah! I got married early, that's why," Mother said.

"I thought she was your younger sister or someone else," Mtsho mo added.

"Many people don't believe me when I say she's my daughter," Mother said.

"I want a baby but it seems hard for me to become pregnant," Mtsho mo said sadly.

"You will! You're young, and you'll have a chance to have a baby later," Mother comforted.

"Don't stand there. Come!" a man shouted from one of the tents.

"Zla ba sees us. Let's go home, and we'll talk more," Mtsho mo said. She put her wood bucket on a stone, leaned her back against the bucket, and then raised the bucket with the leather strap around her shoulders. I carried her scoop.

"Good morning!" a man with long curly hair greeted.

"Zla ba, this is Ye shes's daughter," Mtsho mo said.

"Yes, I heard she has two kids," Zla ba said.

"Come in, Lha mo. This is our home," Mtsho mo said. Zla ba helped Mtsho mo remove the wooden bucket from her back. Mtsho mo helped Mother take off her basket.

"Lha mo, now you see how herders live in a tent," Mother said.

"Lha mo, come sit here," Zla ba invited, and put a small wool carpet on the grass near their three-stone hearth. Zla ba was a young, handsome man with long hair. He was wearing a round, heavy-looking earring in his left ear.

Before I went into the tent, I looked around. When we had approached the tent, I saw basins of cheese drying in the sun. I stood at the tent opening and peered inside. It was square-shaped and looked cold. There was no flooring on the grass. There was a stove in the center. It was messy and disorganized. Things were scattered everywhere. The three hearthstones were of similar sizes. When people cooked, they adjusted the distance between the stones, depending on the size of the pot they were cooking in. Above the fire was an old, soot-covered pot filled with milk. There were only wool carpets to sit on. I saw a bunch of things piled inside. It was wet near the door and I could smell something disagreeable, like what I smelled when I went near my family's stable. Two big pots filled with milk were on the other side of the tent.

"Lha mo, come in!" Mother called.

I went inside and sat near Mother. I saw several newborn lambs lying in a corner of the tent. I couldn't see any beds. I wondered where people slept.

"Lha mo, here," Mtsho mo said, and handed me a dragon-decorated bowl full of milk.

"Lha mo, say 'thanks'. This isn't milk tea, it is pure milk," Mother said.

"Thanks," I said gratefully.

"Lha mo, drink as much as you want. We have plenty of milk," Zla ba encouraged.

"Lha mo really likes yogurt," Mother said.

"We also have yogurt," Mtsho mo said, and lifted a pot lid.

"How did you two become friends?" I asked.

"We met when we were digging caterpillar fungus⁸ last May," Mtsho mo said.

"Lha mo, do you prefer beef and bread or *rtsam pa* and yogurt?" Zla ba asked.

"Both," I said.

"How selfish you are!" Mother exclaimed in embarrassment.

"It's all right, it's up to her," Mtsho mo said.

Mother glared at me, signaling for me to behave myself. However, I thought I deserved all of those good foods.

They gave us cooked beef that was really delicious. Then Mother gave me a handful of *rtsam pa* while Zla ba made bread. As Zla ba baked the bread, I ate a bowl of yogurt as well. I had a very good appetite. I felt it was a special day with so many things to eat that I usually could eat only on festival days.

The baked bread looked dark, and I thought it wouldn't be tasty, but it was the best bread I ever ate. I don't know how much I ate that day. Mother stared at me while I ate like a piglet.

"We also have beef soup, Ye shes," Mtsho mo offered.

Zla ba added more fuel to warm up the soup. I was very full then, but I wanted to taste all the different kinds of food.

"Lha mo, give me your bowl," Mtsho mo said.

After I handed my bowl to Mtsho mo, Mother gasped, "Lha mo! I'm afraid you're going to be sick. I've never seen you eat like this."

"I'm all right. I just like to eat this food. I heard nomads don't

⁸ Caterpillar fungus refers to a traditional medicinal substance.

know how to cook well, but I think you cook very well," I said, and sipped the soup that Mtsho mo had poured into my bowl. "Wow, this is great! I really like it," I said.

"Lha mo, eat more, we have plenty of soup," Zla ba said.

"Lha mo! Why don't you stay with us for some days? Only Zla ba and I are at home. You can go herding with Zla ba," Mtsho mo suggested.

"Since we got married, there have been only the two of us. We really want a baby," Zla ba said.

"Just give birth, then you'll have a baby," I said.

"Lha mo, don't interrupt adults' conversation," Mother chided.

"Mother, I know you think I'm disobeying you, but I think I'm being a good girl," I said.

"Lha mo is a good girl. I'm so happy that you liked our food," Zla ba said.

"Can I just walk around and look?" I asked.

"Sure!" Zla ba said.

I was concentrating so hard on eating that I hadn't seen the hole above my head. I stood up and the sun shone on my face through a square skylight.

"How do you close that opening?" I asked.

"We have a long stick that pushes it up and down," Zla ba said.

I looked for their beds, but didn't see them. I asked, "Where do you sleep?"

"On mats that we put on the ground. We made the mats by ourselves," Zla ba explained.

"Lha mo, please come here and sit for a bit and then we'll go home. If you disobey, I'll never bring you here again," Mother said. I saw some pictures of Buddha hanging inside the room. The pictures were covered with *kha btags*.⁹ A pile of full leather bags was in front of them. On top of the bags was a long, wide board with eight middle-sized silver lamps full of melted butter. They were not lit at that time. There was a pile of thick scripture books wrapped in yellow and red silk nearby. In another corner, I saw some wooden saddle frames for the yaks when the couple moved to other pastures. There were mats and blankets near the saddles. I could not imagine how they slept

⁹ A strip of silk given to people as a greeting and show of respect.

without a bed.

"Lha mo, stay with Zla ba. Mtsho mo will show me their yak dung," Mother said, and went out with Mtsho mo.

"Lha mo, do you want another bowl of milk?" Zla ba asked.

"No thank you," I said.

"Do you want to stay here?" Zla ba asked.

"No, I would miss Grandfather and be unable to fall asleep," I said.

Zla ba played a traditional song on his radio. I was curious about that and ran to him. "I heard that you don't have electricity. How can you play music?" I asked.

"I use batteries," Zla ba said.

When the women returned, Mother gave Mtsho mo the vegetables she had brought from home, saying "We didn't have anything else to bring, so we brought some potatoes and cabbages we grew ourselves."

"Ye shes, we're friends. When you visit, don't bring anything," Mtsho mo said, taking the bag and putting it in a carton.

"Have more tea," Mtsho mo encouraged, pouring milk tea in our bowls.

"Would you like some raw meat?" Zla ba asked.

"I'm OK," Mother said, but I said, "Yes," immediately.

"Lha mo, please!" Mother exclaimed.

"Don't scold Lha mo, she's just being honest," Zla ba said gently, and brought a plate of raw beef.

"Father used to bring beef from nomad places that we ate without cooking," I said.

"We slaughtered this yak ourselves, so the taste is good," Mtsho mo said.

"Who killed this yak?" I asked.

"Zla ba did, and our neighbor helped him," Mtsho mo said.

"Uncle Zla ba, didn't you feel pity for this yak?" I asked.

"Yeah, but we have to eat," Zla ba replied.

"How about you? Do you feel pity?" Mother asked.

"Yes," I said.

"OK, then don't eat," Mother teased.

"I didn't kill the yak, so I can enjoy eating this," I said.

"Ha! You *are* funny," Zla ba said.

After I finished my last mouthful of beef, my belly was so full I thought I would vomit.

"Ye shes, here are some things for you to take with you," and with that, Mtsho mo handed us something wrapped in a plastic bag, and a large hunk of beef.

"Mtsho mo, Lha mo likes yogurt. Please pack some yogurt for her," Zla ba said.

"No, we won't take anything. You gave us yak dung. We don't need anything else," Mother protested.

"Ye shes, don't say that, we're friends," Mtsho mo said.

"You brought us our favorite potatoes and cabbage. We should give you some of what we have and you like. I think that is what friends are for," Zla ba said. Mtsho mo then forcefully put the bags in Mother's basket. I also didn't want to take these gifts, but they didn't listen to our objections.

"Ye shes, please don't refuse, otherwise, I won't visit your home ever," Mtsho mo said impatiently.

Mother accepted the gifts.

"Lha mo, if you want to stay with us, you can," Mtsho mo said.

"No, thank you. I really can't sleep without Grandfather nearby," I said.

They walked with us for a couple of minutes and then we said goodbye. When we got home, I saw that they had given us a big chunk of fresh butter and a big hunk of beef. We cooked beef that night, but I was too full to eat.

My first experience in a herding place was wonderful! I liked the food, the grass, and the friendly people.

YAK THIEVES

It snowed for several days before Lo sar. The snow was unusually thick. Winter is the only season when many families can spend time together, because men return home from earning cash in towns and cities, and children are on school holiday. Everybody looks forward to winter. Local communities come alive with children frolicking, adults visiting each other, and every household playing their favorite music loudly.

Families in my home community are closely linked. When a household has a problem, all the villagers gather and try to find a solution without thinking of personal reward. They treat others' problems as their own.

Two yaks went missing. The whole village joined together to help find them. In winter, livestock are allowed to roam freely because nothing grows in the fields. We are farmers with few livestock. Each household has a pair of male yaks used to plow and a couple of horses for transportation. Some rich families own milk cows.

One chilly morning, Tshe ring got up early and drove his neighbors' and his own livestock to the river. After watering the animals, he decided to drive the animals up the mountain where there was no snow. His family was the richest in our village. They owned fifteen head of livestock. He was very energetic and loved herding. In order to provide animals with more forage, he drove the animals to a valley near our village where there was a dense evergreen forest and bright sunshine that would soon melt the snow. Very pleased with himself, he then returned home.

At about five p.m., he went to the valley to bring his livestock home. It was cold and had started to snow again. When he located his livestock, he realized two yak bulls were missing. He thought they must have returned home but, when he got there, he realized that they hadn't come back. Tshe ring and his neighbor, Lhag pa, mounted their horses and went searching for the yaks. By that time it was dark and very cold. They went to the forest and searched for three hours,

but returned home empty-handed. Tshe ring and Lhag pa then went to village homes and asked for help. Fortunately, all the men were at home. They met, talked, divided into groups, and then set out to search in nearby mountains, forests, grasslands, and neighboring villages.

I was in bed when Tshe ring came to ask Father for help. I got up to see what was going on. Father put on his thickest, warmest robe, a pair of leather boots, a long scarf to cover his face, and a wool hat to cover his ears.

I brought Brother with me to the kitchen window. We saw villagers gathering with their horses. My family had two horses, but the older one was too wild to ride. It bucked until the rider was thrown, so Father took the smaller one.

I went back to bed. When I got up, Father was at home, and said they hadn't found the yaks, even though they had looked for four hours. They had not seen even a single hair of the missing yaks. They were worried that the snowstorm had driven wolves out of the wilds in search of food and that the yaks would be eaten.

That evening at a meeting, our community leader said, "I think a thief must have stolen them. Two yaks cannot just vanish."

"We should go to the County Town and wait for the thieves. I'm sure they'll drive them there to sell to Chinese butchers," Kun mchog, an elder, said.

"It must have been a thief, because those two yaks never stayed out late when it got dark. They were always the first yaks home," Tshe ring said.

One middle-aged woman at the meeting spoke up, "After supper, men should go separately and wait for the thieves. In the morning, we women will go to the mountains and forests and look for them again."

Tshe ring cooked a huge pot of noodles for all the villagers, who continued to discuss what to do while eating.

"My son said that when he was on the mountain last week looking for our horses, he saw two men walk out of the forest where Tshe ring left his animals this morning," said Tshe dbang, a mother of three children.

"What were they doing there?" asked Tshe ring.

"I asked my son, but he said he wasn't sure what they were doing there. The two men walked out of the forest and just sat nearby. We must find the thieves, otherwise we'll lose more yaks in

the future," said Tshe dbang.

After the meeting, men were stationed along the main roads to wait for the thieves.

The next day was much colder than the previous day. Everybody expected to find the thieves or the yaks' carcasses.

Father returned while I was sleeping. They had found no trace of the thieves. Father looked sick. Mother helped him remove his robe because his hands were stiff from the cold.

"There is no way we're going to find those thieves," Father lamented, and went despondently to bed.

"Didn't you make a fire to warm yourselves?" Mother asked.

"How could we make a fire while we were waiting for thieves?" Father answered.

"Oh, right," Mother said.

"We were freezing and walked back and forth for a long time, trying to keep warm," said Father.

"I'll go with some others to the forest and valleys to look for the yaks," Mother said.

"Yes, you should prepare to leave soon. Don't worry about me. I'm going to take a short nap. Then I'll get up and follow you," Father said.

Mother ate breakfast and went with other villagers to the forest where Tshe ring had left the yaks. All the villagers were focused on finding the yaks. There is a saying, "Neighbors are more valuable than relatives who live far away."

Father got up after about an hour and rode out with others who were searching for the yaks. Elders and children prayed they would find the yaks or the thieves. Late in the afternoon, we received news that the yaks' carcasses had been found. The thieves had taken all the good meat, leaving only the heads and some organs. We were all terribly disappointed. The story was that a group of young villagers was in the forest where Tshe ring had left his yaks. The villagers were tired and rested under a big tree. Skar ma saw blood on the ground and guessed that the yaks had been killed. When they searched around the tree, Sangs rgyas stepped on a clump of earth that was suspiciously soft. They dug there and found the yaks' heads and organs. We guessed the thieves had watched Tshe ring leave the yaks and go home. The thieves then killed the yaks, cut away the meat they wanted, dug a hole, buried what they didn't want, and left.

"The thieves are very familiar with our village, and especially

familiar with Tshe ring. The thieves knew Tshe ring regularly drove his yaks far away. Those thieves studied our village for some time and then made their plans," the villager leader said.

"If we do nothing, they'll return," said Tshe ring. He was sad about losing two of his yaks.

"From tomorrow, we must have a regular herdsman on daily watch. Maybe we can catch those thieves if they return," Sangs rgyas said.

"That's a good idea," Father said.

"Each adult man will take his turn doing herding duty," the village leader said.

"We agree!" most villagers said.

"I know it's terrible to find butchered yaks, especially killed by people, not wolves. It would have been better if wolves had eaten them, and then we wouldn't be angry with the thieves. I feel like those thieves were taking revenge on me for something. Maybe they know me. I have never done a bad thing to anybody, but this still happened to me," Tshe ring said.

"I think they are lazy men who wander about when they have no money, and do such evil things," Kun bzang said.

"Don't blame yourself, Tshe ring. We all understand that this isn't your fault," Skar ma said.

"Tomorrow, I'll go to Brag 'go Monastery and ask for suggestions from a *bla ma*," Tshe ring reassured.

"Good idea. Maybe he'll suggest a way to find the thieves," a village woman said.

"OK, that's all for today. Everyone go home and rest. Thanks for all your efforts," the village leader said, dismissing everyone.

I returned home with my parents, who were also very sad about the theft and the killing of the yaks.

The next day, Tshe ring visited the *bla ma* who said that the thieves were very clever and that there was no way to find them. That disappointed us all, especially Tshe ring. Villagers were very careful with their livestock afterwards. Unbelievably, another two yaks went missing about a month later.

It was almost Lo sar, and everybody was busy buying things for the holiday. Still, there was a herdsman to watch the animals during the day. It was Sangs rgyas's duty that day. He used his binoculars to watch the yaks that were far away and didn't see anyone there. Again, men went out at night, and women went to the forest to

look for the yaks during the day. This time we found nothing. We guessed the thieves had driven the yaks away. We spent five days searching for the yaks and found not a trace.

The *bla ma* was again consulted and then the police, who said if we knew any suspects, they might be able to help, but we didn't know who to suspect.

Four yaks had disappeared like magic, and we didn't find any trace or evidence to suggest who the culprits were. Those thieves were cruel and selfish.



The track from Nor bu khug Village to the local herding place (June 2013, Dbang mo).

FIRST DAY AT MIDDLE SCHOOL

When I finished grade six, there were two possibilities for further education. The first was the Tibetan Middle School, located in Tre hor Township, about two hours by bus from Brag 'go County Town. Even though this school was far away, the majority of my classmates preferred this school. However, the school only accepted the best students. Fortunately, I passed the entrance exam and could study there. Out of seventeen students from my school, only one boy and I passed the exam. I was very happy when I heard math would be in Tibetan because I thought it would be easier than in Chinese.

I considered ending my education after primary school, staying at home, and helping my parents farm. However, because of the Nine Year Compulsory Education Policy, I was required to attend for another three years or my family would be fined. Fortunately, my parents were happy to send me to the Tibetan Middle School.

This was my first time to leave home for an extended period. Father decided to escort me to school and asked my neighbor's son what things I should take, because he had attended school there. He said I should take *rtsam pa* to eat for breakfast and also take my own bedding. My parents then bought a pair of bed sheets, a pillow, and a suitcase. Mother also baked bread and cooked some pork for me to take.

I was nervous, worried, and excited at the prospect of attending this new school. At that time, there were no vans in the village, so Father and I carried everything on our backs to Brag 'go. We had horses, but if horses defecated on the County Town streets, we were fined by a watch group.

When we reached the bus stop, a group of parents with children my age were already standing there with piles of belongings. The bus was late, but someone at the bus stop commented that this was very common. Then Father, two mothers, and another student's father decided to hire a van to go to the Tibetan Middle School together. Therefore, two mothers and two fathers boarded the van

with their four daughters. We didn't know each other at first, but our parents were very sociable and soon got to know each other.

That was my first time to take a van and go far from home. I sat at the front, near the driver's seat, with a girl, because even together, we didn't occupy much space. The other six passengers were in the seats behind us. The road zigzagged and was rough, so we bumped up and down a lot. I sat on the girl's lap, and my head bumped the van's ceiling so often that I thought my head would be swollen by the time we arrived.

The van finally stopped. Our parents got out and bought bottles of water for us. We drank some and then continued. I saw many villages along the way. When the van went fast, I got a headache and wanted to vomit. I didn't talk and pretended to sleep. It was a two-hour journey, but it seemed much longer. I asked sincerely, "Have we almost reached Lha sa or have we already passed it?"

My question made everybody laugh, including Father, who said, "Lha sa is thousands of kilometers away, but we *are* almost at your school."

I didn't know what a kilometer was. Finally, the driver announced, "We've arrived." I looked out the window. What I saw was totally different from what had I expected. I had imagined a very big town and a beautiful school, but the town was just a narrow street with some small wooden buildings along the street where local people had small businesses. The school was also near the street. On the sides of a large wire gate were wooden boards with the school's name¹⁰ in both Chinese and Tibetan. The most disappointing thing was that the school was being rebuilt. A part of it had been demolished. Men and large machines were noisily at work. I thought the driver must have taken us to the wrong place. A middle-aged man wearing a black suit ran to our van, and said, "Don't go further, because those are the dormitories." I quickly glanced at the school again. The yard was big. To the right was a two-story building that looked like a classroom building. There was a long line of attached wooden rooms painted in red.

"Get out here, girls," the driver said.

We got out and our parents paid the driver fifteen *yuan* per person. We took our suitcases and bags from the top of the van. The middle-aged man came with a few other students and said, "I'm the

¹⁰ 炉霍县朱倭藏文中学 ལུ་ཁོ་རྫོང་གི་ཇུ་འཇོ་རྩོད་ཅིང་ཡིག་སྐབ་འབྲིང་།

principal of this school. Welcome, and thanks for bringing your kids here."

"It's our pleasure. We are very happy to send our children to this middle school rather than the middle school in the County Town," one mother said.

"Yeah, we're going to beat your children if they break the school rules. We only want the best students who want to learn," the principal said.

"Beat them if they disobey you," another mother said.

"OK, these are some of the best students in this school. They are talented, good-natured people. They will show you to your dormitory rooms and then help you get lunch," the principal continued.

The five students were friendly, respectful, and helped us take our belongings into the shabby rooms, not the newly built rooms. One student asked, "Do the four of you want to stay in the same room or in new rooms? Students are probably living in those rooms, but some rooms have empty beds. If you choose to stay in this room, the four of you can stay together."

The four of us didn't know each other, but we were new and thought it was best if we stayed together. So, we said we wanted to stay in the shabby room rather than stay with strangers.

We chose beds in the room we were shown, and then a student brought us a bucket of milk tea. There were no chairs or tables, so we sat on the floor, took out the food we had brought from home, and had a lunch of bread, beef, and pork. Afterward, we heard a bell ring. A student came and informed us, "All the students should assemble in the yard and listen to the principal's announcements."

We four girls left our parents in the room and went outside, where we saw many unfamiliar faces and voices. I felt that I was on another planet because students were speaking different dialects. I was used to my old school, with students from neighboring villages who spoke the same dialect. Our new school had students from various herding areas, farming places, and students who spoke very different dialects. I could easily identify the new students because they were timid compared to the more confident older students.

"Are you new students?" a tall, handsome boy asked the four of us.

We silently nodded.

"OK, follow me. New students are in rows over there," he said,

pointing.

There were two rows for each class, a girls' row and a boys' row, with students queued from shortest to tallest. I was the second shortest girl. The principal began, "I'm the principal and I have some announcements. First, welcome to everyone. You are in good hands. Secondly, thanks to all the parents who have brought their children here. Third, the construction work will be finished soon, but meanwhile, please respect the workers and don't touch any of their equipment. Finally, new students should go to the teachers' office to find out which teacher is responsible for your class. You also must register for classes. The older students will help you. Classes will start at eight-twenty tomorrow morning. If you have any questions, ask me or any of the other teachers."

The principal was from one of my neighboring villages, so I understood what he said perfectly, but the other three girls didn't understand him very well. I explained what he had said as we returned to our room. Our parents had made our beds, cleaned our room, and were ready to leave. It was a tough moment for me. I didn't believe that I could live without my family members.

"We're leaving now. I'm happy that I saw you here safely. The principal seems very nice. If you have any problems, talk to him. He'll understand you," Father said.

"I will. Don't worry about me," I said. I wanted to say more, but I choked up and couldn't. Father saw tears in my eyes, and said no more.

One girl was screaming in her mother's arms. I realized our parents were sad to leave us, too. It was also hard for Father, so I didn't make it worse by crying in front of him.

"Father, tell Mother, Grandfather, and Brother that I'm happy here," I said with a fake smile.

"I will. Study hard. Don't worry about us," Father said.

"When you leave home to mine for gold, take care," I said and held his hand tightly.

"I'll be all right. When I earn some money, I'll send some to one of your teachers for you," Father said and gave me thirty *yuan*.

"I'll be fine. The school will provide food, so I don't need to spend any money except for a bus ticket when I return home," I assured him.

"Take care. This is your first time away from your family. It may be hard at first, but you're a grownup and must learn to be

independent," Father counseled.

"You know I'm adaptable. Don't worry," I said.

A white van drove up near our dorm. The driver asked, "Are you going to the County Town?"

"Yes," Father replied. Then he turned to me. "The van is here. We will leave now."

I went to the van with Father. I was very sad, but I didn't cry.

"Mother, I want to come back with you," one of the other girls, Bzang mo, called out when her mother left the room.

"You're a young adult. Don't act like a child. Look at these three girls. They aren't crying," her mother said, and gave her a kiss.

"Don't cry or your mother will worry about you. You have the three of us so don't trouble your mother," I whispered to Bzang mo, which calmed her down.

The two other girls were not sobbing. It was hard for all of us.

Our parents got into the van, which took off as soon as the van door shut. I thought the driver didn't want us to be sad.

The four of us were so sad after our parents left that we ran to our dorm room and wailed. I covered my head with my blanket and cried. I felt better. We got up and went out for a tour of the school. When we returned to our room, we saw that the four empty beds had been taken. The school bell then rang, and a student came and announced, "It's supper time. Two of you come with me. One person must get a basin of noodles for your room and the other will fetch a kettle of tea."

Bzang mo and I followed the student to the kitchen and saw two long lines. The student gave me a new metal basin and a used, black-bottomed kettle. He explained the rules. "Follow that row, and wait until you get inside the kitchen. A cook with noodles will ask how many people are in your room. It's very easy. Getting tea is the same. The amount you receive is based on how many people are in your room."

I was in line for several minutes. When I finally reached the big pot of noodles, the cook asked, "How many people are in your room?"

"Eight," I answered.

He gave me three big scoops of noodles, filling the basin.

When I got back to the room, Bzang mo had arrived. The other four girls who had arrived after us were there, too. Their dialect was very different from ours. They were from the area around the

school. A senior student came with eight new bowls and spoons. The local girls lined up our bowls on the floor and used a spoon to divide the noodles, which were tasty. We ate but didn't talk because we were shy, and also because we couldn't understand dialects other than our own very well. As soon as we finished dinner, we went to bed.

I struggled to fall asleep for a long time. I woke up crying from a dream later. The dream was very vague, and I couldn't understand why I was crying. That was my first day in middle school.



My brother, Blo bzang, at Brag 'go Monastery (August 2010, Tshes bcu lha mo).

EARLY MORNING SURPRISES

One morning when I was in grade nine in junior middle school, our class head teacher, Ya ma, said, "Lha mo is an excellent example for the girls to follow, and Nor bu is an excellent example for the boys to follow. These two students have done very well. I wish all my students would be like them. Please study hard and be well behaved."

I blushed as soon as I had heard that wonderful comment. I had never thought I could be an excellent student. Teacher Ya ma had motivated me to do better, and I thanked him in my heart.

"Wow, what a great student she is!" 'Jags dbyangs murmured while I was walking out of the classroom.

"Ha-ha!" a bunch of my other classmates laughed loudly.

"*She* is an excellent student for us to follow?" 'Od zer said derisively.

"Who said you have to follow me? I know I'm not an excellent student, but I will be," I said, and left.

I was so angry that I was shaking. I threw my books on the bed and yelled. Fortunately, it was lunchtime, and I was alone. Two of my roommates brought tea and cabbage soup back to the room. We took turns getting food and tea, but we had to get rice individually. I grabbed my lunchbox and went to the kitchen to get rice. While I was in line waiting my turn, a boy classmate came up and said, "Hi, excellent student. Do you really have time to eat? You should use every second of your time studying."

"It's none of your business, you fool!" I said. I was enraged and wanted to punch him, but I controlled myself.

I said to myself, "Lha mo, you must be an excellent student to prove what Teacher Ya ma said is true."

After that day, I often got up at two in the morning to memorize new words and lessons. I hardly spent any money but, one afternoon, I got permission to leave the school to buy an alarm clock. I spent five *yuan* on a yellow clock that was shaped like a bird. I loved it. I usually slept with my clothes on because that made it easier for

me to get up fast and not bother others. I set the clock for two a.m., put it on my belly, and held it with both hands. When it rang, I stopped the alarm immediately so as not to bother others who were sleeping. The school had a strict rule that we had to turn off the lights and go to bed at nine p.m. Lights were turned on again at six a.m.

I got up in the dark, opened the door carefully, and went outside. I usually went to the classroom to study, but sometimes I studied under lamps in the campus grounds. One morning, a very funny thing happened: I got up at two and put on my large black robe to read under a streetlight, which was near a teacher's room. I thought that no one was up then. The entire campus was quiet, except for some dogs barking in the distance. I didn't read my book loudly because I didn't want to bother anybody. I leaned against the lamp pole and tried to memorize new Tibetan words. Suddenly, I heard a crack behind me. I was shocked, jumped, and then I heard a sound and a door slam very loudly. When I turned, I saw Teacher Lu's room light was on. I thought something was wrong. Then I heard murmuring. I ignored it and continued reading my book. I thought that maybe his girlfriend was with him and they were fighting.

"See, I'm sure there is a black thing near the lamp," I heard someone say, and then the door slowly opened.

"Yeah, there is something," Teacher Lu said, and slammed the door shut again.

I realized they were talking about me. I laughed, went to his door, knocked, and said, "Teacher, don't be scared. I'm Lha mo, not a monster." They became silent for a second, and then Teacher Lu said, "Are you Lha mo? Really?"

"Yeah! I'm Lha mo," I said, knocking again.

Finally, he opened the door. His friend, Teacher Wang, was standing with him. They seemed shocked, not like two young men.

"What are you scared of? Do you believe in ghosts?" I asked, observing their pale faces.

"Not really, but we thought our cook's big dog was there. That dog is very dangerous," Teacher Lu said, opening the door wide.

"Why are you standing under the lamp at midnight? You should be asleep now, not studying," Teacher Wang said.

"I get up early and study. I'm so sorry I scared you two," I said.

"Actually, we really were scared," Teacher Wang said frankly.

"Only you were frightened, not Teacher Lu," I said, looking at

Teacher Lu's face.

"I'm scared of dogs, nothing else," Teacher Lu said.

"I'm sorry for scaring you. What are you two doing up at this time?" I asked.

"Playing cards," Teacher Wang said.

I knew they liked to play cards and gamble.

"Why don't you come in and study in our living room? It's warm. It's so cold out there," Teacher Lu said.

"Thank you, but I'm fine. The cold air freshens my mind," I said.

"You are a great student, but don't be so hard on yourself. Sleeping is important for your health. If you get a good sleep, your mind is clearer," Teacher Wang said.

"I just want to study hard and have a relaxing winter vacation, especially during Lo sar. If I do well at school, I feel good about myself," I said, walking back toward the lamp.

"Good luck! Take care. You are so brave to walk alone in the campus at night," Teacher Wang said.

"Goodnight!" Teacher Lu said, closing the door.

I did a great job that semester, and had a joyful Lo sar with my family. Teachers Wang and Lu were deeply impressed by my desire to study; I heard that they often used me as an example when encouraging their students.

One summer, I got up very early in the morning and decided to go to the classroom to study. Finals were approaching. I put my books under my arm and walked toward the classroom building. It was dark and quiet. From my room to the classroom was about a two minute walk. In the middle of the campus, the cook's dog barked crazily, broke its rope, and ran at me. When I heard the rope snap I was sure I would die. Grandfather had told me that when a dog chases you, you shouldn't move, just stand still. I forced myself to stand still, with closed eyes. I knew if I ran the dog would easily catch me. When the dog reached me, I didn't move or breathe. The dog soon calmed down, sniffed me, and then left. I was so terrified that I stood still for about five more minutes to ensure I was safe.

One Sunday morning, I got up at around five and went to the classroom to study, and stayed there till the breakfast bell rang. Breakfast was at seven, and I was alone in the classroom. I left my books in the desk drawer and went to my dormitory room to get the kettle. We ate *rtsam pa* for breakfast because the school only

provided tea in the mornings. I picked up the kettle and went to the kitchen. People were already in line. U rgyan pointed at my shoes and laughed. I hadn't realized that my shoes were not matching – one was white and the other was black. Everybody in the kitchen then came up and laughed. I wasn't angry. I laughed too.

"Lha mo, your shoes are really fashionable," U rgyan said.

"Thanks, without your help I wouldn't have realized it," I said kindly.

"Are you all right? Don't you feel uncomfortable when you are walking?" U rgyan asked.

"Actually, I feel a bit uncomfortable, but I haven't walked much," I said, blushing and giggling at the same time.

I was in line, so I didn't go back to my dorm room to change shoes. I got the tea and took it back to our room. My roommates were coming back from studying. I told them what had happened, and they all laughed heartily.

I wasn't the top student in my class, but I performed well. All my teachers liked and supported me. I thought I was not as smart as some, but I invested a lot of effort and time to catch up with them. However, all we cared about was the scores that we received, rather than what we learned.

ADMIRABLE BOYS

Lha mo, come see these lucky boys who will go to a big city to learn English with foreigners," Chos sgron, a classmate, said, pointing to people in the teacher's office.

"Will they study at Mtsho sngon Normal University?" I asked.

"I don't know which school, but those people are from Mtsho sngon," Chos sgron said, admiring the lucky boys.

The school bell rang suddenly, which meant that students should assemble in the schoolyard. Chos sgron and I stood where our class usually lined up. After all the students gathered, our principal came and said, "I think you've heard the good news that these two boys will go to Mtsho sngon to study English with foreigners on full scholarships. They might be able to further their study overseas. This is a very good opportunity. If these boys do well, our school will have other chances to send more students there. This is a reward for their years of hard work. Students who were not selected don't need to cry or be sad because this isn't the end of the world. You can go to other schools. Now, let's give these lucky boys a big round of applause," the principal said.

"Wow!" all the students said, admiring the two boys. We knew that the two boys were very smart, and we thought they deserved to be selected.

This happened a day before summer vacation. I thought I would never have such a great opportunity. That same afternoon, I phoned one of my villagers and asked him to tell my family to come meet me at the County Town bus station. It would be embarrassing if no one was there to greet me, because most parents came to meet their kids. Sometimes I couldn't reach my parents, and then they didn't come. I usually had a lot of stuff to carry, and it was hard to put everything on my back and climb the hills on the track to my home.

When our bus reached the bus station, I saw Mother standing on the sidewalk. I was thrilled. Forgetting my luggage, I ran to her and gave her a hug and kiss. I cried because I hadn't seen her for four months. I had really missed her.

"Are you tired?" Mother asked.

"No. Our bus was not very crowded, and I didn't get carsick," I said, handing her my small backpack while I went to get my other piece of luggage – a big backpack.

"I've been waiting for nearly two hours," Mother said.

"I'm sorry! We left early, but had a flat tire. Did you come on foot or did somebody give you a ride?" I asked, wiping the sweat on her nose with my coat sleeve.

"It's OK! I'm not in a hurry! I met Yon tan, and he gave me a ride. That was so nice of him," Mother said.

"Let's go to a restaurant and eat. I'm hungry," I said, waving goodbye to my classmates.

"Your father gave me money for lunch. He said to take you to a restaurant and buy whatever you wanted," Mother said, putting the big pack on her back.

I carried the smaller pack, and we went to a small cheap, Chinese restaurant that was nearby. The weather was hot, and I was famished. We ordered two medium-sized bowls of noodles, which were both cheap and filling. The waitress gave us some tea, which I enjoyed, because I was so thirsty.

After our noodles, we went to the market to buy meat and vegetables for supper. Every time I returned home, my parents bought meat, vegetables, and fruits to celebrate my return. "Shall we rest in the shade for a bit? The sun will set soon, and then we can walk faster and will feel less tired," I suggested, pointing at a shady spot.

"OK. Your grandfather and Blo bzang are at home. They will do the chores. I hope we get home before your father, and then we can prepare supper," Mother said, walking towards the shady spot.

I left the bags with Mother and went to a shop to buy some sunflower seeds and a couple of ice creams.

"I saved some money, so we can have some treats," I said when I got back to her.

"How was school? Did you do well on your exams?" Mother asked, munching sunflower seeds.

"I did well and was complimented by my head teacher," I said.

"Great! I believe that you will always do well," Mother encouraged.

"I'm a good student, but I will give up schooling after another year. I'm very sad about this. I wish I could continue," I said.

"We wish you could, too, but you know our situation. Only your father earns an income, and he isn't healthy. He risks his life earning money for us. His seizures are very unpredictable. We don't know when he may have one," Mother said.

"I know. I'll go do construction work and earn some money, too. Don't worry, you have me to help," I comforted Mother.

"Your brother will help when he graduates from elementary school. He is a hard-worker. We really need his help," Mother said.

"Did he say that or do Father and you want to stop him from studying?" I asked.

"He said he wanted to stop schooling and help his father earn money for our family," Mother said.

"I don't know what to say," I said.

"We should leave now or we won't finish preparing supper by the time your father returns. I'm sure he'll be very hungry," Mother said, standing up.

"Sure. I feel better now," I replied.

"If we talk on the way, we won't feel tired," Mother said.

She helped me put the big pack on my back and then she carried the smaller one. Usually, she carried the bigger one for me, but I didn't let her this time. She was a fast walker, and sometimes I couldn't keep up with her.

"Yesterday, a school from Mtsho sngon visited and selected the two best students from the graduating class to study English with foreigners for two years on full scholarships. Our principal said they might be able to go overseas in the future. Isn't that great?" I said.

"Mtsho sngon! I saw Mtsho sngon Lake when I was seventeen," Mother said.

"Did you like it?" I asked.

"It was amazing, but it was almost twenty years ago. I'm sure many things have changed. Those two students are so lucky. What good karma they have!" Mother said.

"I wish I were one of them," I said, sighing wistfully.

"Who knows, maybe you will be selected when you graduate," Mother said.

"They only selected two among so many students. They just wanted the best ones. I don't think I'll have such a chance," I said.

"Do you know any English?" Mother asked.

"We have an English teacher, but he is often absent and I don't like his class. I haven't learned anything from him. My English

score always pulls down my average mark," I confided.

I saw many familiar faces on the way home. Everybody we met welcomed me back home. At that time, I was the only person who had left home to study in a distant school. My relatives and family members treated me very well. When I met relatives, friends, and neighbors, they usually gave me some money to encourage me to be a good student.

I thought constantly about those two lucky boys during the entire summer vacation, and longed to have the same karma.



Nor bu khug Village (June 2013, Dbang mo).

HARD WORK PAYS OFF

First, don't worry about the graduation party. I have an announcement to share with you," the principal said, smiling at us from our classroom door.

"Oh!" the class monitor said, and stopped arranging the desks.

"Jigs med, tell your classmates to assemble in this classroom," the principal said.

Jigs med went to call all the students in both the classes in our grade to our classroom. We had three grades in our middle school and each grade had two classes. Both classes took the same courses taught by the same teachers.

Ten minutes later, both classes had gathered in my classroom. There were around ninety students. We were all curious about the principal's announcement. Everybody was very quiet, awaiting the news.

"Thank you all for coming. I know you are leaving tomorrow morning, but before your graduation party, I have an announcement, which I think will change some students' lives," the principal said.

After all the teachers had arrived, the principal continued, "At lunch time, my teacher from Mtsho sngon called me. Some of you know him. He came to our school last year to select the best students. The first time he selected two boys, and the second time he selected one girl and one boy. I don't know how many he will select this time, but he's coming here again to select students. I'm sure our four students are doing well in Mtsho sngong so that's why they want more students from our school. What a great opportunity!"

"Please explain why they are giving our school such a great opportunity," Teacher Ya ma said.

"Teacher Bkra shis was my math teacher when I was at Mtsho sngon Normal University," the principal said.

"Here is the name list," my head teacher said, handing a paper to the principal.

"The good news is that he wants to select more students. I'm not sure how many students he wants, but he said we should first

select the best eight among all of you. We teachers have already selected the eight best students, but we want to give all of you a chance to also choose the best eight. I'll write the eight student's names on the board to let you know who is on the list," the principal said, writing the names on the board.

Some names he wrote deserved to be selected. My best friend's name was there. I was happy for her, though we didn't know who would be selected at the end. After he had finished copying the names, I raised my head again to see the other names, and the big surprise was that my name was on the blackboard as well.

"Lha mo, what's wrong? Don't you want your name on the list?" the principal said, looking at me and smiling.

I blushed and said nothing.

"We teachers checked these students' records for three years. They have really done a great job. Both head teachers agreed, too. The reason we want you to select the eight students is that you may think we teachers did something unfair, although we have no reason to do so," the principal said.

"In three years it is clear who did well, and who didn't. You may copy these names down, or if you think somebody else did better than these people, then write their names," our head teacher said.

"Lha mo, put down your own name, too," Bsod nams, a classmate, said, copying all the names down. When everybody passed their papers forward, the principal collected them.

"Dbang mo, please write down the names on the board as I read them to you," the principal said, reading the names we had selected.

I was too nervous to look at the board, because I had never thought that I would have such an opportunity.

Teacher Dbang mo and the principal finished. Most students had copied names from the board except for two students who didn't select my girlfriend and me.

"Your classmates have also selected you, so seize this chance," the principal said, clapping his hands.

"This isn't the final result. We don't know how many of you will be selected by Teacher Bkra shis. Maybe he will select all of you, or he may not want any of you. Be relaxed and ready for the interview. Teacher Bkra shis didn't give an exact date for his arrival. He will phone me before he comes. I'm pretty sure that he will come within the next week," the principal said.

"You eight students will not leave tomorrow. You'll have a room and food here. It's best to stay here because we aren't sure when he will arrive. Now go prepare your party," the principal added.

The boys moved the desks and chairs, girls swept, and then we put the desks in a circle. The school bought bread, meat, drinks, candy, fruits, and other items for our party. All the teachers joined us. Only on this night did our school allow students to drink beer. The male teachers and boy students drank and were soon drunk, but we girls and my head teacher didn't drink. We talked the whole night.

Everybody was packing to leave the next morning. My friend and I were helping others get things to the bus.

For one week, the eight of us had nothing to do but eat and sleep. Some other students went home because their homes were nearby. They brought lots of food for us. Our head teacher said to practice for the interview, but we didn't know how, because we had never been interviewed before.

I called a fellow villager and asked him to tell Grandfather that I was busy at school and that I wouldn't be home for another week. My parents were out collecting caterpillar fungus.

One morning while we were still sleeping, our head teacher knocked on our door and said, "Girls, get up and get ready. Teacher Bkra shis is coming this afternoon."

When we heard that, we were all very nervous, and we looked at each other with frightened expressions. Then we prepared and got ready to welcome Teacher Bkra shis. My friend and I put on our school uniforms, which were the best clothes we had. The principal told us to clean the meeting room. Our school cooked some food and prepared butter tea.

"Are you nervous?" our head teacher asked.

"Yeah! I'm nervous," my friend Tshe lha said.

"There's no reason to be nervous. Teacher Bkra shis is a human being just like us. This is a great chance to be interviewed by him," our head teacher said.

It was a sunny day, so we all sat out in the sun. Suddenly, a car rolled through the school gate. We all jumped up and stood to one side. Teacher Bkra shis was tall and handsome. Our teachers came out with *kha btags* to welcome him, and then escorted him to the conference room.

"Teacher, these are the eight students we recommend. They have done well for three years," the principal said, pointing to us.

"Oh, that's great!" Teacher Bkra shis replied, waving his hand, signaling us to join them. "My name is Bkra shis, and I think your principal has already told you about my school and why we are here."

"Yes," we all chorused.

"First, you will have an exam," Teacher Bkra shis instructed.

We went in and everybody took a seat. Teacher Bkra shis had a paper with our names, which he read aloud. The principal helped Teacher Bkra shis hand out exam papers and pencils. The exam paper was a Tibetan short story. We were instructed to translate it into Chinese. A Chinese story also had to be translated into Tibetan. We had to submit both within an hour.

We also had individual interviews. Teacher Bkra shis went to another room while we waited in the meeting room. Teacher Bkra shis called our names from the list. I was first. Each interview lasted about ten minutes.

The distance from the meeting room to the interview room was not far, but I couldn't walk properly. My entire body shook like a leaf in the wind. Teachers who were outside encouraged me.

"Lha mo, don't be afraid, you'll do well," they said.

The door was half open, I said, "May I come in?"

"Come in!" Teacher Bkra shis replied.

I entered the room and closed the door. Teacher Bkra shis was sitting in front of a desk. He said, "Lha mo, how are you?"

"I'm good!" I said, putting my hands behind my back.

Then he said, "If I select you to study in our school, what will you do?"

I said, "I'll study hard."

"How have you done in school so far?" Teacher Bkra shis asked.

"I've done well," I said.

The interview continued for some minutes, with Teacher Bkra shis asking questions that I answered. Finally, Teacher Bkra shis said with a big smile, "OK, we are done. You may leave."

"Thanks!" I said and left the room. While I was walking, I was shaking, and my hands were clenched into clammy fists. I finally relaxed and returned to the conference room. My classmates and teachers were waiting for me.

"How did it go?" my head teacher asked.

"OK!" I said, wiping sweat from my forehead.

"Come take a seat," our head teacher said, giving me a glass of

water.

The other seven classmates looked worried as they, one by one, had their own interviews. My face was red and burning hot. After all the interviews, Teacher Bkra shis joined us. The principal was with him. We all stood when they entered.

"Do you want to hear the good news or the bad news first?" the principal asked us.

We looked at each other and said nothing. I could hear my heart racing. I prayed, "Buddha bless us, otherwise, I'll never have a chance to continue my schooling."

"Good news first," a student said.

"OK," the principal said and brushed his hair with his right hand. "You are all selected. How wonderful! We expected the worst but hoped for the best."

"Wow!" the eight of us exclaimed, jumping up and hugging each other. The other teachers were also very happy.

"You eight are very good students. I've not had much time to get to know you, but you all made a good impression. Your principal recommended the best students. He will tell you the details. I must leave now because I have to visit other schools," Teacher Bkra shis said.

We gave him *kha btags* and walked him to the gate.

"We will have a meeting before you leave. Bring one of your parents. August twenty-eighth is the best time. You must go to a doctor and have a health check. We must ensure that you don't have any serious health issues. You will return here in late August, but you may leave earlier. The school in Zi ling has Tibetan students from all the Tibetan areas. This is a great chance to learn English with foreigners. If you do well, you may have a chance to go abroad. You will have two years of scholarship. If you don't pass a college entrance exam you won't have a degree, so you must do well. When you go there, buy your own ticket. The school will return your ticket fee when you arrive," the principal said.

We spent the night at school and celebrated our good karma. I was so happy. I thought that this was the best gift for my family members. The next day we took a bus to the County Town. My parents were still away collecting caterpillar fungus. Neither Grandfather nor Brother was there to meet me. I had a lot to carry, and it was hot. I left some of my heavy articles at a friend's home, and then I carried the rest of my stuff home. It took two hours for me to

walk there. I was tired, but when I thought about the good news I had to share with my family members, I felt better.

Grandfather was at home. Brother was at school for his final exams.

"Grandfather! I've been selected by a school in Zi ling City," I said, and then I explained all the details. He thought this was a gift from Heaven. He was so happy that tears shimmered in his eyes. Brother came from school, and was also thrilled with the news.

There was no phone, so my parents didn't know what was going on. After a couple of weeks, Mother came home to weed the fields. When I told her my news, she was excited and very pleased. We told our friends, neighbors, and relatives. Everyone was happy.

After Father returned two weeks later, he was also delighted. Everybody was proud of me.

JOURNEY TO ZI LING CITY

We must go to the County Town to meet my principal and the other classmates' parents. Would one of you please come with me tomorrow?" I said to my parents. It was August twenty-seventh, 2006.

"Of course we will meet your principal and classmates' parents, and decide how you eight will travel to the new school," Mother said.

"I can surely go, but if you go with her, I can transport the remaining barley from the field back home before it rains," Father said.

"I'll go with her," Mother said.

Early the next morning, Mother and I walked to the County Town. We met the principal and my seven other classmates with their parents in an office in the County Town Education Bureau. Except for Mother, all the parents present were fathers.

"Please take a seat and make yourself comfortable," the principal said.

There was a large painted desk surrounded by fancy chairs. Everyone took a seat. A woman came in with glasses and poured tea for us. The principal was printing something at a photocopy machine in the corner.

"Thanks for coming. This is a very important opportunity for your children. Here is an agreement paper for the parents of each student. Read through it and sign your names. Keep one copy for yourselves and give me the other. We should keep these papers and, if something goes wrong in the future, we will have something to look at and talk about," the principal said. Then he explained where we were going, how the program worked, and what would happen.

I helped Mother read through the paper. It was generally about our safety. It said if we didn't do well at school, the school wouldn't be responsible.

The principal then took all of us to the hospital for a health check, and the results confirmed that we were all healthy. After all

that, the principal and our parents had time to talk about how we should go to the school.

"The principal said we must pay for the tickets and give them some money first. When they reach their school, the school will pay their expenses. We are lucky that our kids can get an excellent education for free," Lha lha's father said.

"Let's choose two parents to escort the kids to school. We can collect their ticket fees and other expenses from the eight families, and then we'll know that our kids safely reached their destination," one father suggested.

"These kids are grown up, and there are eight of them. Let's find a trustworthy driver to take them. It is unnecessary for two parents to go with them. They can travel better than us," Rin chen's father said.

"My daughter has never been to a big city before. I'm a bit worried about her traveling without any adults," Mother said.

"All the kids are new to big cities, but they're young and will learn fast," 'Od rgyal's father reassured.

"We should ask the driver to be responsible," Lha lha's father said.

"OK," everybody agreed.

Lha lha's father soon found a local driver and brought him to us. The driver said, "I've never been to Zi ling City, but I'm sure we'll be fine."

"How much will you charge?" Lha lha's father asked.

"I really don't know how much I should charge, but I'll ask some of the other drivers," he said. About an hour later he returned and said, "I asked several drivers but found only one who knew something. I must charge 400 *yuan* for each student. If you can pay, I'll go, if not, I won't, because the roads are not good, and it takes a lot of gas. Also, I don't think I'll get any passengers to return with me."

"Why not charge 350 *yuan*?" Lha lha's father asked.

"Uncle, if you were me, you would ask more than 400 *yuan*. We are all from here, and I've never been to Xining City. We don't know the real situation very well," the driver said frankly.

"OK, so we can pay 400 *yuan*, but you must be responsible for our kids' safety," 'Od rgyal's Father said.

"I've been driving for years, and I have had very few problems. If you want to know more about me, ask the other drivers. Obviously, I wouldn't play with my own life," the driver replied.

"Please drive them to the school and ensure they are safe," Mother implored.

"Aunt, I will," the driver said.

"OK, the day after tomorrow we'll see you. What time do you want to leave?" Lha lha's father asked.

"Earlier is better. How about we meet at four and leave at five?" the driver suggested.

"Fine. Most of us will be in the County Town. It will be easy for us to come. You're from very near the town right?" Lha lha's father asked Mother and me.

"It's a little far, but it will be fine," Mother said.

"How much luggage will you have? My van is supposed to take seven people, plus myself, which is eight, but you have eight people, and students often bring many things with them," the driver said.

"Each kid will probably have a big bag and a backpack. We can tie it all on the top of the van," Lha lha's father said.

"Fine, but please bring less if you can, because we will have an extra person. If the police stop us, we will have to say that I'm one of your uncles, and I'm driving for free," the driver said.

With our plan decided, Mother and I said goodbye and went to buy meat and vegetables in the market. When we got home, Father had finished transporting the barley. We cooked supper and enjoyed it.

I washed my hair and some clothes. Father gave me a thousand *yuan* which my parents had earned from collecting and selling caterpillar fungus. Four hundred *yuan* was for the ticket and the rest was for other expenses. I had never had so much money before, and I felt rich. Mother gave me an additional 200 *yuan* for food and lodging on the way, and then she sewed the remainder into a small bag and told me to wear it around my neck inside my clothes. I wanted to return 200 *yuan* to my parents, but they insisted. They knew I was going to live in a far-away place with strangers.

The next day, we got up at two and got ready to leave at three. Mother helped me carry my things. I didn't have much to take. Father bought me a medium-size fabric bag. I didn't take a backpack though.

I said goodbye to Father and Grandfather. They escorted me to the gate, where Grandfather wept, which made all of us sob. Father wanted to come too, but he had to help a neighbor transport their barley from their fields to their home later in the day.

Unfortunately, it had rained a little so the roads were slippery.

I took off my new shoes and put on an old pair. Mother and Brother wore rain boots.

None of the villagers were up when we passed their homes, but their dogs barked fiercely.

We met the other students and the driver, who all came on time. I changed my shoes and gave the old pair to Mother to take back home. We tied all the big bags on top of the van and put the smaller ones in the back. Our parents bought some water and food for us to have on the way.

"It isn't five yet, but everyone is here. It's better for us to start now. You can all go home and rest," the driver said.

"OK, please give us your phone number," Lha lha's father said, and the driver complied. My friend and I sat in the very back. We said goodbye to our parents and left. I was really sad to leave Mother and Brother. I told Brother to obey and help my parents and Grandfather. He was also sad.

Four of us were crammed together on the back seat. The middle seat had three people, and a girl sat up front.

Not long after we left, three girls were seriously carsick and vomited in plastic bags, which made the rest of us all feel like vomiting.

After this, we reached Rdza chu kha County Town at noon and stopped to eat several dishes and some rice at a Chinese restaurant. We enjoyed our lunch, except for the three sick girls, who didn't want to eat anything. My friend and I ate a lot because we weren't car-sick.

We drove nonstop, except for toilet breaks and to buy drinks and snacks. We had planned to drive the whole night, but the driver got very tired, and said we should find a hotel.

We reached a small town where the driver asked a Muslim wearing a white hat where we could find the cheapest hotel, and he took us to a hotel. The driver didn't really negotiate with the hotel manager. I didn't know how much we paid, but the manager put five girls in one room with two big adobe bed platforms. The room smelled nasty, which was bothersome. Three of us slept on one bed, and two girls slept on the other bed. The blankets were smelly, like they hadn't been washed in ages. I was cold. We covered our lower body with the blankets and covered our upper body with our coats.

We rested for five hours, until the driver knocked on our door and said we had to leave. We set off without eating and reached another small town at noon. We had noodles, rested for an hour, and

then continued our journey.

We asked for directions on the way. The driver's Chinese was poor, as was ours, but we tried our best. We drove on toward Zi ling City. When we got there it was dark, and we couldn't find the school. We might have driven near the school, but we were lost.

"Let's rest in a hotel and drive to your school tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, you can call the students who are from our home place," the driver said.

"Yeah," we agreed. We were exhausted and hungry. We found a nice clean hotel and each of us had our own bed. After we got settled, we went out for dinner. The city was wonderful. There were many things for sale. We had a great supper in a fancy restaurant, and then bought some fruit and took it back to the hotel. We sat together and chatted for a long time.

The next morning after we got up, the driver called the students who were already at the school. As it turned out, the school was very near to our hotel. The driver drove us to the school where former students from our hometown welcomed us, and helped unload the luggage and take it to our dormitory rooms. We thanked the driver and paid him. One boy went with him to the train station to buy a gift for the driver's family.

We were disappointed to see that most other new students had one of their parents with them. While we were in our friend's dorm room, all the girls talked in Chinese mixed with English, which made me homesick. My friend and I didn't talk at all. They showed us their teachers' photos, which made us nervous.

"Do these teachers speak Chinese or Tibetan?" we asked.

"Only English," they said.

"You will learn English like magic. When I first came here, I thought I would never learn English, but I had learned a lot after several months. The teachers are amazing," one girl said. I could tell she was from Lha sa by her accent.

We were happy to have such a great chance, but being in a strange place and the prospect of learning English with foreigners also made us nervous and a little afraid.

The newcomers had an English test on the first day. I didn't understand any of it, so I copied English from the test paper to fill in the blanks. I noticed that the foreign teachers only spoke English, so I was worried and felt isolated.

I came out of the classroom after the exam and saw a bunch of

students in a circle with one of their foreign teachers in the campus yard playing games. The teacher was an adult, but was playing with a group of kids. That was impressive. I realized these teachers were different from my former instructors. I wanted to join them, but I was not brave enough.

The next day, the school divided us into two classes. Class A was the slow one, and Class B was more advanced. My friend and I were both in Class A. We were not sad because we knew that we didn't know any English and decided to learn English as quickly as possible.

Later, Teacher Kevin gave us a chance to pick English names. I picked 'Sophia', but then there were two Sophias, so Teacher Kevin gave me the name Emily, a name I love.

Our foreign teachers spoke only English. For the first several days, I didn't know what was going on. I was homesick and anxious. My friend and I got up at two or three every morning to study. Sometimes when we were on the way to the classroom, other students were returning to the dorm room from late-night Tibetan dancing or internet bars.

When we didn't know how to pronounce words while we were studying, we stopped somebody and asked them. The students in our school were helpful and friendly.

Our teachers asked us questions in the classes. That was very scary. I worried about that a lot, especially in Teacher Kevin's class. I think he knew what people were thinking, because, when I was not concentrating on what he was teaching, he would ask me to answer a question. While I was standing, I didn't know what to say. After being caught by him several times, I was very careful and improved.

In my former schools, our teachers didn't ask us questions often. I was quiet and shy. Actually, I was cowardly.

Once, when I was answering, I had bent my head and looked at my feet. My teacher said, "Are you admiring your shoes?" I shook like a leaf in the wind and could not raise my voice.

I had a hard time initially understanding the foreign teachers, but I gradually understood what they were doing in class. They were very friendly, respectful, and intelligent. When we had an exam, my friend and I scored in the eighties, and our teachers put us in Class B. We were stressed at first, because all the students were so clever and already knew some English. Later, we were fine.

My friend and I didn't speak much Chinese. We only knew our

local Tibetan dialect, so it was challenging to shop and to talk to people who didn't know our dialect. We didn't communicate with other people much.

We wanted to go shopping one weekend, but we didn't know in which direction to go. We also didn't know how to go by bus or taxi. We walked through our school to the main street, and then walked straight ahead. We walked for about an hour without turning left or right. The street was so long that I thought we could have walked for days. Then, we turned around and walked back to school. My friend was really afraid to cross busy streets. Her strategy, once she stepped onto a street, was not to look for cars, but just run to the other side. Sometimes, drivers scolded her and shouted things like, "Are you blind?" It took a long time for her to learn to cope with the traffic.

The next day, a friend asked us to go shopping, so we went with her. She knew all the shops. We took a crowded bus to the markets. Whenever the bus stopped, my friend and I almost slammed into other passengers. People looked at us very strangely.

The market was very big and had a huge variety of goods. We liked many things, but we didn't have enough money to buy everything that we wanted. We had to buy pants and each bought a pair.

Gradually, we learned to speak English and then we weren't frightened to answer questions in class. When we answered questions, we made eye contact with the teachers. Our Chinese also rapidly improved and we went shopping by ourselves.

Time flew by. It seemed that two years were like a few seconds. We loved our school. Every ETP (English Training Program) student said ETP was the best and most memorable time in their life.

I learned English, teaching methodology, and how to be a good teacher. Teacher Kevin was never late for classes, even when he had gout attacks, and was never absent from class for any reason. He took three to five minutes to talk, or give instruction, and the rest of the time was for us to use English to, for example, retell the text we had read for homework. He had prepared exercises ahead of time. We worked in pairs and groups, and frequently changed partners. For nearly all of the class we were speaking, reading, writing, and listening in English and doing activities with different people. Often, he asked us for feedback from the books and articles we had read. We sat in a circle, could see each other well, and we could move around

easily.

All the students loved him. He encouraged students to write their life stories, do cultural preservation projects, and so on.

I learned how important it was to be a professional teacher, especially when starting with students who knew no English. Teacher Kevin had a lot of energy. He taught in class, and during breaks, he encouraged students to play games as a group and joined us. This helped us relax.

Many ETP students have studied abroad. He broadened so many people's minds. His students will teach others for generations and do many good things. English is a worldwide language. It's so important to know it. It opens many doors for us. ETP changed our lives and brought us into a much wider world. It was an incredibly beautiful life experience.



With Andrea Blum at Brag 'go Monastery (March 2008, Marc Gold).

MARC AND ANDREA

The Tibetan New Year Festival period lasts fifteen days, followed by religious rituals in the monasteries. In 2008 while I was at home celebrating the holiday with my family, Mother and I went to our local monastery to watch monks dance. When we got there, we saw a group of foreigners taking photos.

"Go practice your English with them. I want to see you speaking English," Mother said.

I became nervous and I said, "No, people will laugh at me."

"You are useless if you don't use what you have learned in school. If you don't speak English with these people, will you speak it to us who cannot understand it?" Mother said rather angrily.

"OK. Don't get upset. I'll go talk to them," I said reluctantly. I walked over to a woman standing near us. She was medium height and wore a black fur coat and brown winter hat.

I said, "May I practice English with you?"

"Sure, of course," she said, turning to face me. She had short dark hair, a long face, and a sharp nose. She was beautiful. I also noticed a fancy camera hanging from her neck.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"I'm Andrea, and you?" she said.

"I'm Lha mo. Where are you from?" I asked.

"I'm from the USA. Where did you learn English?" she asked.

"I am in a school called ETP. My teachers are from the USA and Australia. What do you do?" I asked.

"I'm a writer," she replied.

A man joined us some minutes later and said, "I'm Marc, Andrea's cousin. Who are you?"

"I'm Lha mo," I said.

He was short, mostly bald, had a beard, and looked to be in his late forties. He also held a camera. "How did you learn English?" he asked.

"I was selected by ETP when I was in middle school, and I've been learning English for two years," I said.

"She has American and Australian teachers," Andrea said.

"Wow, where is your school?" Marc said.

"In Zi ling City," I said.

While we were talking, an old beggar approached and said, "Girl, can you ask them for some money for me, please."

"Why is she begging?" Marc said, handing over five *yuan*.

I asked the beggar, "Why are you begging?"

She replied, "Because I have no money to live and eat."

I translated what the beggar said, and Marc then handed a hundred *yuan* to the beggar. The beggar was delighted and thanked him.

Later, I asked, "What brings you here?"

"I have a charity called 100 Friends. I go to poor places to help people," Marc said.

"Where are you headed?" I asked.

"We are going to Dkar mdzes County Town to help a school. We bought school supplies for the school, and we're going to give medicine to local people," Marc explained.

Once I knew that he helped poor people, I said, "I passed the entrance exam to a college in Zi ling and I want to continue my studies beyond the two year period covered by the scholarship for the two year program I just finished. But my parents can't afford to pay for my tuition. Would you be able to help me?"

"How much is it?" Marc asked.

I said, "Around 4,000 *yuan*."

He used his iPhone to convert the *yuan* into dollars, and then said, "I don't have that much money with me, but maybe I'll be able to help in the future. Here's my card. Write to me."

I didn't know how to use computers at that time. I thought after I returned to Zi ling, I would ask my teachers to help me.

Marc took some photos of Andrea and me together. I saw Mother standing on the side with a big smile. I brought Mother over and introduced her to them. Gradually, many people formed a crowd around us, because people rarely see foreigners in our place. After Marc and Andrea left, Mother and I stayed until the monk dance finished, and then we went home.

In March, college was restarting, but my family didn't have any money for my out-of-pocket expenses at school, so my parents decided to borrow money from neighbors and relatives. I went to Zi ling with this borrowed money. I knew it was hard for my parents to

pay off this debt. Blo bzang had already dropped out of school to do migrant construction labor and help my parents with the farming work. Though he was tall, he wasn't physically strong enough to carry heavy concrete poles. I had seen his shoulders covered with scars. I understood how hard it was for him to do such work, for which he wasn't paid much. I promised myself that I would try to find a way for him to do other work.

Later, my parents sold our only horse and sent me the proceeds so that I would have a bit of spending money.

Once I got to Zi ling, I met Teacher Elena and said, "Teacher, I need your help. I met an American named Marc in my home place a month ago. He said he has a charity called 100 Friends, and that he might be able to help me with my tuition fees."

"Do you have his email address?" she asked.

"Yes, he gave me his card," I said, showing it to her.

"Great! Come to my home tomorrow at noon, and I'll help you write to him," she offered.

The next day I went to her apartment, and she helped me write to Marc. After some days, he replied that he would assist me, and then Teacher Elena gave me the money from her bank card. She was very kind. I was thrilled about all this.

After a year, Marc visited me in Zi ling. He and Teacher Elena contacted each other and became friends. Through Teacher Elena, Marc helped several other ETP students. He and I also went to some villages in Mtsho sngon and helped some students and old people.

With his support, I finished two years of college study and earned my Associate Degree. My dream then became to go overseas for further study.

Actually, I must thank Mother who encouraged me to talk to Marc and Andrea. Much of what happened later was because of Marc and his assistance.

LHA SA

What do you want to do now?" Father asked me at the beginning of 2010 as we were having sour noodles for supper.

"I want to go to Lha sa and get a temporary job," I said.

"Why do you always want to go so far away from home?" Father asked.

"I want to go overseas to get further education, but it isn't an easy thing to do," I said.

"I think you should try to get a job and settle down near us," Father advised.

"I agree, but I don't want an official job. I don't think I can pass an examination for a government job. If I do pass and get a job somewhere around here, my life will be finished. How boring. I feel like my life is so limited. I'm like a frog that only sees the sky of the well it's trapped in. I'm young, and I should get more experiences before I settle down. If I don't try now, I'll never achieve my dreams. This is not what I want. Please give me some time to do whatever I like. I know I'm the oldest child and the entire family rests on my shoulders, but I know what I'm doing, and I hope you'll trust me," I explained.

"Think about what you really want to do. Children go to school, get a degree, find a job, and settle down. You are a girl. Having a steady job and being near your family is important. I don't know what you are thinking," Mother said.

"Why do you want to leave us again? You've been away since 2003. We only see you during the New Year. I thought you would get a job and stay with us. It's really hard for us to let you travel alone all the time. Girls shouldn't be out alone," Grandfather said.

"Going abroad is good. You should try, because it could be fun. If I were you and spoke English, I'd go somewhere else, too," Brother added.

"What do you know? She speaks English, so she can be a

teacher," Father said.

"Don't think getting an official job is Heaven. If I were a teacher, they might pay me 1,500 to 2,000 *yuan* per month, but I have to eat, live, buy clothes, pay the phone bill, and travel. Do you think that I can support this family with such a salary? I don't think so," I said.

"It's fine for us as long as you have a good life. The key is for you to settle down and to try and support us. You know what I mean?" Mother said.

"I know what you mean, but I want to go somewhere else where no one knows me and start a new life," I said.

"You don't want to live with us?" Grandfather said sadly, and began sobbing.

"I don't mean that. I'm young. I need to experience the world," I said.

"Father, don't cry. Let's change the topic," Mother said.

That argument was over. I didn't change my mind, but I didn't mention it again until the 2010 Tibetan New Year.

We had a nice Lo sar. I cherished the time with my family. I visited some of my neighbors and relatives. They all asked me what I was going to do, and I said I didn't know.

Before we finished celebrating Lo sar, I told my family members, "I'm sorry for upsetting you, but I must go to Lha sa. One of my friends will come with me, so you don't need to worry about me. I won't be alone."

"You are very stubborn. Whatever you want to do, I won't say a word. You are mature and know what you want," Father said.

"When do you plan to leave?" Mother asked.

"I'm going to the County Town to meet two friends tomorrow. I'll ask them if they want to come with me," I said.

I met my two friends the next day. They both were boys; I had several very good friends who were boys. We helped each other while we were in ETP. One said he couldn't come because he had to return to Zi ling to see his girlfriend. My other friend, Dbang phyug, said he would think about it.

After a few days, Dbang phyug called and said he would go with me. I was excited about that. My family members knew Dbang phyug very well, so that they were happy, too. I collected my best clothes and washed them. My suitcase was shabby, but I brushed it off, and it looked better.

Dbang phyug and I planned to leave soon, but my parents wanted me to go to the local monastery for a blessing ritual first. Dbang phyug and I left at the beginning of March. First, we went to Zi ling. Dbang phyug stayed at his girlfriend's place, and I stayed in my friend's rented room. Then next day, Dbang phyug and I went to buy train tickets to Lha sa, but we couldn't get tickets until March thirteenth.

I stayed with my friend all the time, visiting schools and shops we had frequented while we were at school. The days passed quickly.

On the morning of the thirteenth, my friend escorted me to the train station, where we met Dbang phyug and his girlfriend. The train station was crowded with people. I was still thinking about what I really wanted to do. I felt I was lost in the crowd.

Luckily, we each had a narrow bed on the train, which was better than a seat. The compartment had six beds, and ours were the top beds, which were uncomfortable.

"What do you want to do in Lha sa?" I asked Dbang phyug.

"Get a job," Dbang phyug said.

"Me too. I have a friend in Lha sa, Tshe brtan, who owns a small company that produces religious paintings. I think we can stay at his place," I said.

"That would be nice," Dbang phyug replied.

"He's a year younger than me and is very capable. I heard he earned a million *yuan* last year, but I don't exactly know how he earned so much," I said.

"He is younger than us and earned a million? Wow! Amazing," Dbang phyug exclaimed.

I called Tshe brtan and asked him to pick us up at the train station the next day. He agreed, and said we could stay at his home as long as we wanted. Dbang phyug and I were very happy about that, because we couldn't afford a hotel. We had very little money with us.

The next noon we reached Lha sa, where it was still cold. Tshe brtan and his friend had come to welcome us. He was wearing a beautiful sheepskin robe. His friend was a short, skinny boy with dark curly hair.

"Welcome! I'm so glad that you finally achieved your dream of coming to Lha sa," Tshe brtan said.

"Thank you for meeting us. Wow! This is a nice atmosphere. I love it here. This is Dbang phyug, one of my best friends," I said.

"I'm Tshe brtan. Welcome!" Tshe brtan said, shaking hands

with Dbang phyug.

"I'm Bsam pa, Tshe brtan's friend," said the short, skinny boy.

"OK, don't just stand there, let's go home," Tshe brtan said, hailing a taxi.

Tshe brtan pointed out the Potala on the way to his home. We were amazed. I thought, "Finally I have the chance to see this great historical landmark."

His rented house had many rooms, but little in the way of furniture. He had bought beds, new blankets, and mattresses for me and Dbang phyug. He said, "I don't know if these are the best, but if you don't feel comfortable, just tell me, and I'll change them."

"Oh, we'll be fine with these. I really appreciate you preparing all this for us," I said.

"OK, then let's go out for dinner. I'm sure you two are starving," Tshe brtan suggested.

There were several Chinese restaurants near his home, and we headed to one that served noodles. We each ordered egg and tomato over noodles, which was tasty and warmed us up.

The next day, after Tshe brtan's workers arrived, he took Dbang phyug and me to the Potala for a visit. It is truly an amazing place. I just wanted to stay and look at it. I wondered how our ancestors built such an outstanding building.

There was much noisy construction around the Potala. Many Tibetans were circumambulating it. We did one circumambulation and then went to a Tibetan restaurant that served both salty and sweet tea. That was my first time to have sweet tea. The first sip was strange, but then it was good.

For the next few days, Tshe brtan took us around Lha sa. We were so happy to be there. Then we started looking for jobs. We went to Internet bars to search online. I saw some travel agencies were looking for tour guides, but we didn't have the required certificates. While we were still trying to find jobs, Dbang phyug wanted to leave Lha sa and go to Beijing. I don't know why he was so eager to go to Beijing. He didn't give me a clear answer. Dbang phyug said, "If I find good jobs in Beijing, I'll call you and you can come to Beijing, too." Tshe brtan escorted Dbang phyug to the train station the next morning.

I still wanted to stay in Lha sa and get a job. I tried to get interviews at different agencies. Fortunately, one day I received an email from a travel agency called Nyi 'od 'Sunshine'. The message

said they were looking for a translator. I knew my English and Chinese were not good enough to be a translator, but I still went to the interview anyway. I asked people for directions along the way. When I got to the building complex where their office was, I called their number. A few minutes later, a beautiful, tall Chinese woman came to meet me at the gate. She was wearing a long red cotton coat. She led me into an alley. When we reached a big red metal gate, she stopped and opened it with her key. It had a very nice yard with a small playground. I saw a swing there.

"You must wait for our boss. He'll be here in a minute," she said, sitting in a chair.

It was a regular home. They had made their office there, in a square room, with four tables. There was also a printer, two phones, and paper folders in a bookcase. It looked simple to me. I had hoped to work in a big office with many workers, something that was professional looking. "Sit and have some water if you like," she said, showing me a thermos under the desk.

After about ten minutes, a middle aged man arrived. He was short, thin, and wore simple clothes. "Are you Lha mo?" he asked.

"Yes," the woman said, answering on my behalf.

"Nice to meet you! I'm Cheng," he said.

"Where did you learn English?" he asked me in English.

I thought he must have been to an English speaking country, because his pronunciation was good and he spoke fluently. I told him where I was from, and how I had learned English. Then I asked, "Where did you learn English?"

"I taught myself," he said.

"Really?" I said in surprise.

"That's true, he did teach himself," the woman confirmed.

"I taught myself, but only my secretary and wife believe me," he added.

"I don't have much to ask you, but I want you to translate this article into English," he said, opening a desktop computer and showing me an article.

The article was about a foreigner who was coming to China through the travel agency. Translating it into English was tough. I tried hard and finished it. He checked it and said, "You have to learn more vocabulary to translate this into good English. I know you are new to this work, so I'll give you the chance to work for us as long as you are willing to learn."

"I'm willing to learn," I said happily.

"Come here at eight-thirty a.m. tomorrow. I want you to search for tourist sites and Tibetan cultural events online. Copy them into a word document and save them for me," he said.

The woman gave me the office key. She then added, "My name is Fang. You may call me Sister."

I thanked them and went back to Tshe brtan's home. He was happy that I had found a job in a travel agency.

"How are you going to go to work?" Tshe brtan said.

"I'll walk there. It only takes about an hour," I said.

"Can you ride a bike?" Tshe brtan asked.

"No, I tried only a few times when I was a kid," I said.

I started work the next day, searching online for local cultural activities and important cultural sites. Every noon I went out to have my lunch alone. It was not the best life, but I liked it. Fang was helpful and kind. She was married and had a two-month-old son. She was from Chengdu, and had left her son with her mother in Chengdu, because she was scared that the climate and altitude in Lha sa would make her son ill.

One day, Cheng's wife came and said, "I hope you like it here. If you do well, we will increase your salary but, for each of the first few months, I can only pay you a thousand *yuan*."

Cheng was the boss, but I thought his wife was very bossy. For several days many tour guides came for interviews.

On the way back to Tshe brtan's home one day, I passed a fancy Tibetan hotel. On the gate was a notice that said they needed a hotel manager who could speak English. I dialed the number on the post, and a man answered. I said, "I want to be interviewed for the hotel manager position."

"I'm Skar ma. If possible, come now," he said.

"Great. I'm just at your hotel gate," I said, walking inside.

The hotel was in a Tibetan traditional style and fancy. A man was standing at a door. "Are you Skar ma?" I asked.

"Yes, come in," he said.

The interview didn't work out, because he wanted a person who could work for more than twelve hours a day, and the payment was only 1,200 *yuan* a month. I negotiated for a higher salary, but he wouldn't budge. "I have to work twelve hours a day and you only pay twelve hundred *yuan*? You are a very new boss. You don't know much about being a boss or an employer," I said boldly.

"I also will provide you with room and board," Skar ma said.

"I know, but I can't do it," I said, standing up, ready to leave.

"Well, I'll add 300 *guan* if you really want to do it," Skar ma added.

"No," I said without thinking anymore about it, and left.

I went to work at Nyi 'od the following day. Cheng was there.

"Are you doing well? I think we may need you to go out to talk to hotels and restaurants. How do you come to the office from where you live?" Cheng asked me.

"I walk," I said.

"Do you ride a bike?" Cheng asked.

"No, but I can learn," I said.

"You are very willing to learn things. If you do well, I'll promote you and increase your salary," Cheng said.

"Thanks, I'll do my best," I said.

I was new to the city and very new to social interactions, talking to very different people and dealing with things. I was also scared about the things that I had to do, but I pretended that I could do whatever I was assigned.

"Do you want to take a tour guide test? I have a friend who is a tour guide, and he may have some ideas about that," Tshe brtan said.

"I really want to, please," I said.

"Now you must learn the history of Tibet, otherwise it's hard to pass the test," Tshe brtan advised.

"How I can learn it?" I said.

"We can go buy a book if you want," Tshe brtan offered.

"Sure, I can do that," I said.

We bought a history book. Tshe brtan brought me to his friend, Grags pa, who was a tall, handsome man in his late thirties. Grags pa took me to the Tour Guide Agency Department Office. A woman there asked, "Where are you from?"

"I'm from Brag 'go, Sichuan," I replied.

"You can't take the test in Lha sa. You must take it in your home place," she said.

"Why?" Grags pa asked.

"She isn't from Lha sa, I'm sorry," she said, and left.

That was unfortunate, but I still had the opportunity to translate for Nyi 'od.

BDE CHEN

After I had been in Lha sa for some days, I heard from my good friend, Bstan ma. She told me she was in Bde chen teaching English. She described Bde chen very favorably. I was envious, even though I was in sacred Lha sa. Her description of Bde chen made me think it must be a great place to visit.

I called her a few days later and said, "Bstan ma, please find a job for me there. I want to come!"

"I'll try. I know a travel agency looking for a translator. I'll talk to them and let you know," she promised.

Bstan ma called a few days later. "I think she's interested in you, but you have to contact her directly. The boss will interview you on the phone. Prepare well," she advised.

"I'll try my best. Does she speak Chinese or should I speak English?" I said.

"She's from India. Her name is Judy. She can speak and understand some Chinese, but she will speak English with you," Bstan ma said.

"I'll try my best. Should I email her or just wait for her call?" I said.

"It's better for you to contact her through email," Bstan ma said, and gave me Judy's email address. I wrote to her, describing my background. She replied, asking for my resume. I sent what she asked for. She soon phoned me said, "We're looking for a lady who can speak, read, and write English and Chinese, and who has computer skills."

I re-did my resume. I was still very new to society and had little experience outside Nyi 'od.

I didn't tell my Nyi 'od colleagues that I was looking for another job, because Boss Cheng was a really nice person. However, I really wished to go to Bde chen. Nyi 'od was a nice place to work, but I had few friends in Lha sa. If I was in Bde chen, I could have fun with Bstan ma.

The next day Judy called and said, "What is your job in Lha

sa?"

I replied, "Translator."

"How much do they pay you?" she asked.

"A thousand RMB a month," I said.

"I just looked at your resume. I liked it. I'll pay you a thousand the first month and add more if you do well," she said.

I thought a thousand was reasonable, because I had little experience.

After the weekend, I returned to Nyi 'od. Cheng was there too, but I didn't dare tell him that I wanted to quit. I was in a dilemma. Before finishing work, I told my colleague that I would quit, because my parents wanted me to go to school.

"I'll call our boss and tell him. Then I'll pay you the salary," she said, and called Cheng. Cheng's wife answered the phone. She said she had something to do at the office, so she would be there in a moment. Cheng's wife arrived with her daughter. She asked, "Are you going back to school?"

"Yes, my parents want me to continue," I lied. Actually, it was somehow true because I was considering returning to school.

Cheng's wife paid me for the ten days that I had been working and said, "I'm glad that you are going back to school. If you want to come back and work here, let us know."

I thanked everyone, said goodbye, and left. I returned to Tshe brtan's home and announced, "I quit my job. I'm going to Bde chen."

"Are you kidding?" Tshe brtan said in disbelief.

"I'm serious," I replied.

"You are really something," Tshe brtan said.

"What do you mean by that? Of course I'm something, I'm a human being," I joked.

"I thought you were going to stay a long time. I was thinking of buying you a bike, so you wouldn't need to walk to your office and back," Tshe brtan said.

"Thank you. I'll never forget your help, but I want to go to Bde chen. I'll buy a ticket for tomorrow morning," I said.

"How do you want to go Bde chen? If you go by train you must return to Chengdu and then to Panzhihua, and then take a bus to Bde chen. It's a long way," Tshe brtan said.

"Is there a bus from Lha sa to Bde chen?" I asked.

"I've heard there is one, but it takes three days and two nights. The roads are rough, too," Tshe brtan said.

"I think I'll take the bus instead of going through Chengdu," I said.

Tshe brtan went with me to the bus station. He said, "If you're going by bus, I'll come with you."

"I can go by myself," I said.

"I know you can, but I want you to get there safely," Tshe brtan said kindly.

"Please, you've done so much for me already," I protested.

"We're friends and should help each other," Tshe brtan said. When I bought the ticket, he bought one for himself. I didn't like that, but he was very stubborn. We got tickets for the next day's bus.

We went back to his home and packed. I had a lot, so I went to the post office and mailed some books and clothes home.

"Return the bus ticket tomorrow morning and stay here. You have workers to oversee. I'll be all right," I pleaded.

"It's fine. My friend will look after my workers," Tshe brtan said.

We went to the bus station very early the next morning. The bus was crowded. Each passenger had a tiny bed with a dirty blanket. We were both on the lower beds next to each other. Before boarding the bus, one of the bus drivers gave us plastic bags to put our shoes in.

I was cold. I wrapped my lower body in the blanket and covered my head with my cotton coat, and I slept until we stopped. Tshe brtan and I had noodles in a small, dirty restaurant. The noodles were great and warmed my frozen body.

We continued our journey until a noise suddenly woke me. I rubbed my eyes and looked through the window. I saw we were on a high mountain. I looked for Tshe brtan, but he wasn't there.

I got off the bus and saw that we were stuck in a huge traffic jam that stretched for kilometer after kilometer. Hundreds, if not thousands of cars and trucks were stuck there. Rocks had rolled down the mountains, blocking the road. People were gathering to do something. The road was narrow and high.

Tshe brtan and I had nothing with us to eat and drink. We hadn't imagined we would get stuck in the middle of nowhere. After some hours, it was hard for me to stand. I returned to my bed and tried to sleep. Gradually, I fell asleep, dreaming about food.

That afternoon, a police car came and set off an explosion among the stones blocking the road. Four hours later, we started off

again, and eventually reached a town at around midnight. Everybody was so hungry that they ran to the restaurants. Tshe brtan and I had fried potatoes, rice, and a dish of eggs fried with tomatoes. I was famished and ate a lot.

We then went to a small shop and bought some snacks in case we were stranded again.

After dinner, my entire body warmed up, and I soon fell asleep. The next day was sunny, and I used my phone to take pictures. I talked with Tshe brtan for most of the time. That afternoon it started raining, making the road slippery and dangerous.

We were on the mountains most of the time. The darker it got, the heavier the rain. The sound of rain was overpowering, and I worried about our safety.

I kept quiet and Tshe brtan didn't try to talk to me either. Some people were sleeping. I could hear them snoring. I must have fallen asleep again because Tshe brtan suddenly woke me up and said, "You must come out and register."

"Register? We already gave our IDs to our driver. Isn't that enough?" I responded in confusion.

"Two policemen have asked everybody to come out with their IDs to register," Tshe brtan said.

I put on my shoes and followed him outside. It was pouring rain. I saw five people in a line by a police car. I got in line. Two more people came and stood behind me.

When I approached the police car, I saw two young men inside. One was in the front seat with a notebook and pen, and the other was just sitting in the back seat.

I handed my ID to the man in front. "What's your name?" he asked, staring at me.

"Lha mo" I said. I thought, "You have my ID so why are you still asking me my name."

"Where are you going?" he said.

"To Bde chen," I said.

"Why are you going there?" he asked.

"To work," I said.

"What kind of work?" he said. His friend was staring at me all the time.

"Translator," I answered.

"How many languages do you speak?" he asked.

The man in the back seat laughed loudly.

"Tibetan, English, and Chinese," I said, wondering why he was asking me so many questions.

"Don't you speak Japanese, too?" the man in the back seat mocked.

"If I didn't know some languages, how could I be a translator?" I said.

"Ha!" the man in the back seat chortled.

I said, "What's wrong with you? Why are you laughing at me?"

"Who laughed at you?" the man in the front seat said.

"Your friend is constantly laughing at me. Don't you think it is odd to look at somebody's face and laugh all the time?" I said.

"I'm not laughing at you," the man in the back seat said.

"Please don't look at somebody and laugh for no reason," I said.

"Girl, don't be so proud. Who do you think you are?" the man in the front seat shouted.

"It isn't my fault. Tell your friend not to laugh at me," I said.

"You are evil," the person in the front seat shouted, and threw my ID, his notebook, and pen on the floor of the car.

"What's the matter with you? Don't you want to go?" he complained, getting out of the car. Then he came near me and threatened, "I won't let this bus go. If you want, you can stay here all night."

"Why did you stop us for no reason? What kind of person are you? You demon!" I protested.

Tshe brtan saw I was arguing with the police, came up, and said, "Don't argue. We are all Tibetans."

"So what that we are all Tibetans?" the policeman said.

"Don't be angry, please," Tshe brtan said.

"What? You want to fight?" the policeman goaded.

I was depressed and angry. I got between them and said forcefully, "You are arguing with me. It has nothing to do with this person. If you want to fight, fight me."

I wanted to slap him, but he ran to a pile of stones. I ran behind him, kicked his butt with my hiking shoes. and shouted, "Bastard!"

He angrily turned but didn't hit me. He threw some stones at Tshe brtan but missed him, too.

I said, "If you are a real man fight me. Don't trouble others."

He said to Tshe brtan, "You think I would love your

girlfriend? No way! She's a bitch."

"Who told you that I'm his girlfriend? I'm his sister," I yelled.

He again threatened, "I swear to Buddha, I won't let you leave tonight."

I protested, "This is your fault, you must let us leave tonight."

Both policemen then locked themselves in the car and wouldn't talk to us. Tshe brtan and I returned to the bus. Everyone was cursing those two policemen.

"Please talk to them and apologize for your argument. I know it was their fault, but they are difficult people and can give us problems," implored the two bus drivers.

"I think they want money. I can give a couple of hundred if they are shameless enough to take it," Tshe brtan said.

"Just give one hundred," I said.

Tshe brtan and I both went to their car and knocked on a window and said, "Please let us go."

"Why should I let you leave without you apologizing?" the man in the front said.

"I'm sorry, everything is my fault," I said, but my tone didn't communicate regret.

"That's an apology?" the man in the front seat said.

"Here is a hundred *yuan* for our apology. I'm sorry," Tshe brtan said

"Just a hundred and you want to leave?" he said.

"We don't have more than a hundred," I said.

"But you said you are a translator," he said.

"That doesn't mean I have money," I replied.

"I'm not asking you to give me money. I'm not a corrupt person. I honor my job," he declared, shoving Tshe brtan's hand away.

"Do you know what kind of uniform I'm wearing?" he asked.

We said nothing.

"OK, then," Tshe brtan said, putting the hundred back in his wallet.

"You kicked me and you still want to leave?" he exclaimed, pointing at Tshe brtan.

"Don't lie, I kicked you, not my friend," I said.

"You both kicked me. You beat a policeman! What attitude!" he said.

"I kicked you, not my friend. Is that clear?" I reiterated.

"I want to take you two to jail," he said.

"Why? What crimes have we committed?" I asked indignantly.

"You beat me, and I can't walk properly now," he said.

"What a liar you are," I said.

"I'm serious. If you want to go to jail, I can free others. If you don't want to go to jail, I'm going to stop your bus here all night," he said stubbornly.

"Please, let us go," a passenger in his sixties begged.

"Why should I?" the police asked.

"No matter what, there is no reason for us to go to jail," I said, and returned to the bus.

After about an hour, a driver came inside and said, "We can leave now."

"How is that possible?" I said.

"I don't know, but they said that we can leave now," one of the drivers said.

Then both policemen came over. One said, "I swore to Buddha not to let you leave, and I broke my promise, you must chant scriptures for Buddha to forgive me."

I thought, "I will chant scriptures to curse you, you bastard."

They also returned my ID. It was about three-thirty in the morning by this time. We were all wet from the rain. I apologized to all the passengers and the drivers.

They said, "It wasn't your fault. We all know those people are dogs who only know how to torture innocent people."

"I don't like those men at all. I'm from Beijing and my wife and I are tourists. When we return to Beijing, we'll call the government and ask them to dismiss those people from their jobs. I need to know the name of this place and those policemen's names," a middle-aged Chinese man said.

"The one who sat in the front car seat is Thub bstan, and this place is Smar khams," one driver said.

The Chinese man wrote down the name place and the policemen's names.

I was sad that the police were Tibetan and had acted so rudely. Tears streamed down my frigid cheeks. I wondered why ruthless people tortured innocent people.

The next two days went smoothly. We reached Bde chen in the afternoon. I called Bstan ma, but she was working and couldn't come meet me. She told me her address. Tshe brtan and I went there. Tshe

brtan and I had dinner together. He wanted to leave immediately and went to buy a ticket after we finished dinner. He went to Lijiang. I stayed in Bstan ma's room. She came back very late, and we chatted for a bit, but then she had to go to bed because she had to get up early.

I was happy that I was with my friend, but I was still depressed about the two rude policemen.

The next day, Bstan ma left for work. I called Judy and informed her that I was there. She gave me her address, and I took a taxi to her office. A young Tibetan lady came to greet me. She was from Lha sa, so I had a hard time understanding her Tibetan dialect. Their office was in a suburb of Zhongdian, in an ordinary two-floor, adobe house. I went inside with the young Tibetan lady. The house had a small, neat yard with a few trees and a small door. The living room was neat and well-arranged. Their office was to the left of the living room. The rooms were Judy's private quarters. Her office and other rooms were full of various flowers.

Judy greeted me warmly, and returned to whatever she was doing. Then the Tibetan lady took me to their kitchen and made me a cup of Indian tea.

I sat there while Judy finished her work. She then came and introduced herself, her travel agency, and her employees in detail. My first impression told me that she was a nice woman.

They arranged for me to stay upstairs where her other employees lived. The landlord lived on the second floor, too. It wasn't the best place to live, but it was very nice that she offered me a free room. Otherwise, I would have had to pay rent, which I couldn't have afforded.

The following day, I went to her office to work. She said that I could use one of her desktop computers, but I preferred to use my own laptop. She helped me access the internet and gave me a small printer that I could use whenever I needed. She then introduced me to my job. She wanted me to translate Chinese into English, and English to Chinese. I wasn't good at it frankly, but I wasn't afraid to try. She said I would answer phones and emails. I did lots of faxing to hotels. My Mandarin wasn't perfect.

Judy was very generous and told me to ask her for money if I needed an advance. I thought that was a skill a boss needed. She often offered me lunch. I started work at nine in the morning. At about eleven, she cooked lunch, which was often various Indian

dishes. She was sophisticated and knew a lot about the world. Sometimes we took a bus downtown to have lunch. Whenever I ate with her, she always treated me. It seemed that she had known me for ages.

She was well-known locally, and had earned a good reputation.

I was the youngest employee and everybody at the office treated me very well. It was a pleasant, unforgettable life experience.

I learned so much from Judy and her passion for life, compassion, patience, intelligence, experience, and constant happy smile.



I visit the Potala in Lha sa (March 2010, Kun dga').

TO THE USA

I applied to several schools in the United States and was accepted by College of Marin, near San Francisco. I then went to Beijing to apply for a visa. Mother phoned during this time and said, "Please buy some medicine for your father. It's better to purchase it in a big city."

"What do you mean? What's going on?" I said.

"He's sick again. I didn't want to tell you, but I can only ask you for help," Mother said.

"Has he had another seizure?" I asked.

"Yes, and it was much worse than before," Mother said.

My heart hurt. Whenever I hear about Father's seizures, I feel sad and uncomfortable.

"Instead of buying medicine, we should take him to a doctor," I suggested.

"I agree," Mother said.

"I'm waiting for my visa. I'll get it tomorrow afternoon. I'm going to buy a train ticket and go to Chengdu. Bring Father to Chengdu. It's not good to let him come alone," I said.

"Isn't Beijing better than Chengdu?" Mother asked.

"I don't know. I'll contact some hospitals here," I said.

"Great," Mother said.

"Have you finished harvesting?" I said.

"We've finished cutting, and are now hauling the sheaves home. Villagers are busy threshing," Mother said.

"Where is Father now?" I said.

"He's at our neighbor's, helping them transport their crops," Mother said.

"It's dangerous for him to work. Please make him rest. Work is important, but Father's health is more important than his work. If you don't finish work today, you can do it tomorrow, but if something happens to him then it's finished," I said.

"I told him to stay at home, but he said he knows his own health," Mother said.

"I know he's stubborn, but this is not the right time to be stubborn," I said.

"I feel bad that we have never had a chance to take him to a good hospital to see a doctor. I feel guilty," Mother sobbed.

"Mother, don't say that. We all wanted him to go to hospital at the very beginning, but we didn't have enough money. Poverty is the main cause of all these problems," I said, also sobbing.

"Your father doesn't want you to know what's going on, but I thought it would be better to ask for your suggestions," Mother whispered.

"I'm glad you told me. I'm going to call Father," I said.

"Good idea. Say you want him to go to hospital in Chengdu. He won't listen to me," Mother said.

"I'll convince him," I said, hung up, and dialed my neighbor's phone.

"Hello," my neighbor said.

"This is Lha mo. Can you please give my father the phone?" I said.

"Hello," Father said a moment later.

"How are you?" I asked.

"I'm good. Have you got your visa yet? When are you leaving?" Father said.

"Come to Chengdu for treatment, and then I'll leave," I said.

"Did your mother tell you?" Father said.

"Yes," I confessed.

"I didn't want you to worry about me," Father said.

"You must take your health seriously. Your health is your life," I stressed.

"I know, but you're already in Beijing. I'll take care of myself. You do your business and go to school," Father said.

"My father is more important than anything else. I can go to school anytime I want, but I only have one father," I said.

"You mean I should come to Chengdu?" Father asked.

"Yes. If you come to Chengdu the day after tomorrow, I'll take a train and go there too," I said.

"It's too much. I swear I'll visit a doctor here. Going to Chengdu for treatment is too expensive, and I don't want you to be late for your classes," Father said.

"Father, I told you that your health is more important than anything else. I can give up anything for you. Money isn't a problem.

We can borrow money and pay it back later," I said.

"It's better for me to stay at home and see doctors here, but maybe you can buy some medicine for me in Beijing," Father said.

"Without seeing you, how can the doctors prescribe medicine? If you won't see a doctor in Chengdu, I'm not going to school this semester. Mother should travel with you. I won't feel good if you travel alone. I know it will cost a lot, but money isn't a problem if you are healthy," I said, determined to persuade him.

"Let me think about it," Father said.

I hung up and searched for hospitals online. I found some and chatted with a few doctors online. I asked them about medicine for seizures. They all wanted to first see the patient and then provide medicine. They said, "Causes for seizures vary. We don't know what medicine to prescribe without examining him. Bring him to us first, so we can identify the cause of his seizures."

I went to a post office near the US Embassy the next day and got my visa. I was glad that I finally had it, because the process had been difficult. I was already late for school because my I-20 form had come late. I emailed Marc, my sponsor, telling him Father was sick, and needed me.

"Lha mo, yes, you must help your father. I'll try to help with his expenses. If you can't go to school this semester, you can go next semester," Marc replied.

Marc's email comforted me a great deal. I went with my friend, Lha mo mtsho, to the train station to buy a train ticket. Lha mo mtsho is from Rnga ba. I met her through one of my former classmates. She was studying at Central Nationalities University in Beijing and wanted to go to Chengdu, because she'd never been there. The conductor said, "There are no seats. Do you want standing tickets?"

"How long will it take to get there?" I asked.

"Two days, and a night," she said.

"Lha mo mtsho, do you want to come with me on a standing ticket? It will be awful, but I must go. Maybe you can go later," I said.

"I'll come with you," she insisted.

We bought the tickets and returned to her dorm room. I had all my belongings with me in a big bag that was so heavy I couldn't lift it. I opened it to get rid of some things. But, when I went through it, I wanted to keep everything.

"Do you want to return to Beijing after helping your parents?"

Lha mo mtsho asked.

"No, it's better for me to take everything because I don't know if I'll be able to go this semester," I said.

Later that night, I called my parents and told them my plan. "I've bought my ticket, so there's no way for you to say no. I'm leaving tomorrow morning and will arrive the next day in the afternoon. You should go to the County Town tomorrow, find a reliable car, and come to Chengdu. Leave the day after tomorrow in the morning, and I'll come meet you," I said.

"Your father hasn't decided to come yet," Mother said.

"I know what he's thinking, which is why I bought the train ticket before I asked about his decision. No matter what, you must come with him, even if things are busy at home," I stressed.

At that time, Blo bzang was in a school in Lha sa, learning English, so he wasn't at home. It was hard for my parents to send Blo bzang back to school, but I said, "If you love your son, more education will bring him a better life." It was also not easy for Blo bzang who, by this time, was almost nineteen. But he did return to school. He didn't know Father was sick. If he had known, he would have dropped out of school again.

"I'll come. I'm going to give the phone to your father now," Mother said.

"You already bought the ticket?" Father said.

"Yes, Father. We haven't taken your illness very seriously. This time you must listen to me," I said.

"You know how busy things are here. We must do threshing before the stalks and grain get wet. I can get medicine here," Father said.

"You have had local medicine for years, and it hasn't helped. You can finish work when you are healthy. Don't delay, or it will be too late," I said.

"Yes, we should go," Mother said in the background.

"We'll come," Father said finally.

"Mother, borrow money from our neighbors and relatives, as much as you can," I advised.

"I already asked your aunts, uncles, and our neighbor, and they all agreed," Mother said.

"Great," I said.

The next morning, Lha mo mtsho and I left very early. The train was so crowded that we hardly had space to stand. The hardest

thing was my luggage, which was too big to put anywhere, except in the middle of the aisle. The other passengers didn't like it.

Gradually, we moved to the smoking compartment of the train and sat on the floor, even though the air was full of smoke. The floor was hard and our bottoms ached. All the smokers came there and smoked. We wanted to say something, but it was the place for them to smoke, so we kept quiet. We sat in the corners and put our heads on our knees to sleep. Every time when I awoke my neck, back, and hands were so sore that I couldn't move them properly. I felt that night was much longer than it should have been. It was very hard to get to the bathroom, because the aisle was full of people. People were sleeping anywhere they could fit their bottoms.

It was hot and humid. I smelled very nasty from sweat and cigarette smoke. My clothes were soiled with gobs of snot and spit. I hoped we would arrive soon. We tried to eat something, but it was hard to eat with all the nasty things around us.

Finally, we reached Chengdu at about five p.m. We were tired and hungry. We got a taxi to Wuhouci, where many Tibetans live. We looked for a hotel and found an acceptable one. We left our belongings there and then went out to eat.

I called my parents' driver at seven. They were already at Wuhouci, so I went to meet them. I was so glad to see them. We hugged and then I took them to a nearby restaurant.

"How was your journey? Did you have lunch on the way?" I asked.

"Yes, the driver was very nice," Mother said.

"Actually, we shouldn't have come. I don't want to trouble you," Father added.

"Don't think too much," I said. After dinner, we went to our hotel.

We got up very early the next morning and went to the Sichuan Provincial Hospital. We didn't take a taxi because it was expensive. Instead, we asked directions and took a bus. It was the first time for my parents to be in Chengdu and take a bus. I entered the bus first and found a seat for Father. Mother and I stood. It was hard because we are both short and couldn't reach the hand rails. Eventually, I got a seat for Mother, too.

I loved their expressions of surprise. From that experience, I dreamed of taking my parents and Grandfather to other big cities to let them see things outside our village and small county town. I

wanted them to experience some of what I have experienced.

The hospital was crowded with patients. The system was new to me. I had to get a number and wait to be called. Finally, we got to see the doctor. They said Father had to stay in the hospital for an examination but, because they had no room, they wanted us to move to their branch hospital. A van came to drive us there, which took about an hour in hot, humid weather.

The driver dropped us in front of a tall building where many people were moving in and out. We got into the building, and saw more people there. A young nurse came and led us to a room with two beds and a small bathroom. An elderly lady was in the bed by the window. Her husband was sitting near her. It was a simple, clean room.

We put our things down. A few minutes later, a doctor came and said he was Father's doctor. He said Father had to stay at least one week for tests. We agreed. They did several examinations and gave Father some pills.

"I'm sick from this hot, humid weather. I would never live in a place like this," Father said.

"Me neither," Mother replied honestly.

I was glad to be with my parents. When we were free, we went out exploring. Many things were very new to them. It was fun to take them to shops and neighborhood parks.

The doctor gave Father fifteen days' worth of medicine. I said, "Could you please give him several months' worth medicine? It's hard for them to return."

"We can give no more than fifteen days' worth of this medicine. That is the law. If you want more medicine then you must return for another examination," the doctor said.

"What causes Father's seizures?" I said.

"We are not completely sure, but the medicine we are giving is good," the doctor said.

We then left the hospital and went to a hotel. "Let's go to the zoo tomorrow," I said.

"No, no, it's too much," Father said.

"What do you mean by too much?" I asked.

"It's better for us to go home tomorrow morning," Mother said.

"You're already here. Why not stay one more day to see more new things," I urged.

Mother looked at Father and said, "What do you think?"
"OK," Father agreed reluctantly.

We got up early the next morning to go to the zoo. The entrance fee was twelve *yuan* per person, and it was worth it. That was the first time for my parents to see so many different kinds of animals. I was delighted to be able to take them to a zoo. We then found a nice driver and car to take them back home.

My parents left at five the next morning. I felt sad to see them leave, but I tried not to cry. My flight was at one p.m., so I went back to sleep.

At eleven a.m. I got a taxi to the airport and started my journey to the USA.



Me with my family and Mother's cousin's family (June 2010, Bsod nam byams pa).

THE NEW WORLD

My flight from Chengdu to Beijing was postponed for almost an hour. My flight to San Francisco was almost ready for take-off when we landed in Beijing. I had to go through all the check-in process again. I rushed to the gate, but it was closed. I pleaded with a service woman, "Please help me catch the flight. My connecting flight was delayed, so I'm late."

"You're too late, I'm sorry," the woman said.

"Please, it isn't my fault," I said.

She called somebody. A man came and demanded, "Why are you so late?"

"My flight from Chengdu was delayed for almost an hour. I'm sorry," I said.

"OK, let's go," he said.

I followed him to the plane and looked for my seat. As soon as I sat in a window seat, the plane began moving. I put my backpack under the forward seat and watched from the window. The plane moved slowly, gathered speed, and then lifted into the air. I wondered if I was really going to the USA. I watched as we gained altitude and the buildings and mountains became smaller. Gradually, I could see only the sun and clouds.

Meanwhile, I recalled what Father had said to me when I was a little child, as he and I were enjoying the sun in our courtyard one day. An airplane had flown high above our house. I stood to see it better. I was thrilled. Father said, "Go to school. Study hard. Maybe one day you will go somewhere by airplane."

"Sure, I'll study hard. Not just for myself, but I'll take Mother, Grandfather, Brother, and you by airplane, too," I said.

"Oh, my good girl," Father said and patted my head.

Tears streamed from my eyes as I recalled that experience. I thought, "Father, I have studied hard, and now I'm on a plane to America. I'll study hard and soon give you and other family members a chance to travel by airplane, too."

I wiped away my tears and returned to the present. A stewardess was demonstrating how to operate the seat belt, air conditioner, and so on, which I ignored.

I closed the window shade and reclined in my seat. I closed my eyes and thought about what had just happened, and what was going to happen. I thought about my parents who had just returned home from the hospital. I prayed for Father's good health.

I was thinking so much that I didn't notice who was sitting near me. Eventually, I fell asleep and dreamed about the USA, even though I had not arrived.

Somebody suddenly touched my hand. I jerked awake and saw a stranger's face. I dreamingly wondered where I was and what was happening. I had totally forgotten that I was on the plane. Then a Chinese woman sitting near me said, "It's time to eat. I thought you would miss the meal, so I woke you. I'm sorry if I startled you."

As soon as I saw the stewardess, I realized I was on an airplane. "Here is your meal," the stewardess said, and gave me a box of food. I opened it. It smelled nice. Fried rice, fish with vegetables, and a piece of bread were inside. I realized that I was hungry. I ate it all and then went back to sleep.

It was a long flight, though I don't know how many hours it took. When I woke up, the plane had already landed. I heard a stewardess say, "We have landed in San Francisco."

I felt nervous and thought that I was dreaming. Once the plane stopped, everybody started to leave. I got my backpack and followed the signs to the baggage claim, and waited, but my luggage didn't come. I approached an Asian service lady and said, "I've come from Beijing, but my luggage hasn't come. My friend is waiting for me."

"You're in the right place. I don't know why you didn't get your luggage. I'll make some calls," she offered, and then talked to somebody for quite a long time. Then she said, "I called the flight you came on. They have no more luggage. Maybe they didn't put your luggage on the right flight in Beijing."

"I had a connecting flight to Beijing. I was late. They said they would put my luggage on the next flight," I said.

"If your friend is waiting, please leave your contact number and address. I'll get your luggage and send it to you," the lady said.

"May I leave my contact number, name, and address of the person who has come to pick me up? I don't have a phone number

yet," I said.

"Sure," the lady said.

I gave her Marc's sister's address and number. Then I ran outside the terminal, and stood there. I had contacted Marc's sister through email when I was in Chengdu, so I knew that her car was green. I didn't know if she was tall, short, young, or old. Suddenly, a green car pulled up and a little lady said, "Are you Emily?"

I said, "Yes. Are you Valerie?"

"Yes, I'm Marc's sister," she said and got out of the car.

She had a bunch of nice yellow and red flowers, which she gave me. Then she hugged me. She said, "Oh, you have no luggage?"

"I do, but I didn't get it. I left your contact number and address with the airline. I think they will send my luggage to your home," I said.

"Do you want me to go inside and talk to them?" she offered.

"No, thanks. When they have the luggage, they will contact you," I said.

"OK. You can wear my clothes if you need a change. Let's go. Do you mind if we first go to a dentist to fix my tooth? One of my teeth has come out and I look like a monster," she said.

"I don't mind," I said.

While she was talking, I looked through the car window, and wondered, "Am I in America?"

It took around a half hour to reach her dentist. She introduced the streets and other points of interest we passed on the way, but it was so new for me that I understood very little.

The dentist and her Chinese helper were very welcoming. The helper spoke Mandarin, so I felt comfortable.

An hour later, she took me to lunch at a restaurant where I had *chow mein* and salad. The food was OK, but not as delicious as what I ate at home. However, I was hungry and finished it all. Valerie paid and left a two dollar tip. I thought, "Wow! Two dollars could buy a whole meal in my home place."

We drove to her home, which was an apartment with a bedroom, living room, kitchen, and bathroom. It was perfect size for one person. I had thought that she would live with her family members, but I dared not ask why she lived alone. She lent me some of her clothes and showed me the bathroom. I showered and changed into clean clothes.

"This is my son and his wife," she said, gesturing to a picture

on the wall.

"Where are they?" I asked.

"They live in New York City, where they are ballet dancers," she said. I didn't know what ballet dancers were and I didn't ask.

She told me many things, but my mind was elsewhere. I slept that night, and my dreams were all about Tibet and my family members.

The next day was Saturday. When I woke up, I had the same feeling that I had on the plane. I wondered where I was.

"What do you want to do today?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"Shall we go to the ocean or see other things?" Valerie said.

"I want to go to the ocean, because I've never seen it before," I exclaimed.

"That's what I thought. Put on some warm clothes, it'll be chilly," Valerie advised.

While we were on the way to the ocean, the airport called Valerie and said my luggage had arrived. We went to the airport and picked it up. Next, she drove me to the ocean, which I really liked. I especially enjoyed the sound of the waves. I saw many people jogging, walking, surfing, and doing yoga.

I felt lost in this new land. Maybe that is culture shock.



I see the Pacific Ocean in San Francisco for the first time (September 2011, Valerie Gold).

HAIRCUTS

It was Monday just fifteen days after I had arrived in the USA. I was already a month late for school. When I arrived, all the other students already knew each other and had friends. On my first day, I brought lunch with me, and after my class, I went to the kitchen to eat. Others also came to have lunch. I didn't know anybody, but lots of people came to say hello and introduced themselves. I noticed there were no native English speakers. All the students were from outside the USA. There were about thirty students in total, from Thailand, Japan, Korea, China, Egypt, Iran, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Peru, Hong Kong, France, and Germany. The English level of the students was not very good.

"My goodness! What's wrong with your hair? A Saudi Arabian girl said one day at my school.

"I permed it twice in a month," I said.

"I thought you might have some kind of disease," she said.

"No, my hair was damaged by chemicals," I said.

"Yeah, it looks very frizzy and damaged. You should cut it short and let it grow naturally," a Japanese girl said.

"You should cut it and buy nice shampoo to protect it," a Korean boy said.

"Who curled your hair?" an Egyptian lady said.

"I went to a cheap hairdresser," I said.

"Nice hair is an important personal adornment. You shouldn't let just anybody curl your hair," the Egyptian lady said.

"Lha mo, if you want I can help you with your hair. I have all the necessary things," a middle-aged woman volunteered.

"Thanks. Where are you from?" I asked.

"My name is Carol. I'm from China, but now I'm a US citizen," Carol said.

"Wow! Great. Do you speak Chinese?" I asked.

"Of course, but while I'm at school, I don't speak Chinese because my boyfriend wants me to practice my English," Carol said.

"Is he American?" I asked.

"Yes, he is," Carol said.

"I mean if you speak English all the time, your English level should improve rapidly," I said.

"Not really, I have been in the USA for five years, and my English is still very limited," Carol lamented.

"Yeah, it takes time," I said.

"Lha mo, do you want to come to my home tonight? I can help you with your hair," Carol said.

"I think I'll go to a hairdresser," I said.

"It costs a lot to have your hair cut," Carol said.

"Really?" I said in surprise.

"I always cut my boyfriend's hair. Don't hesitate. Have you ever seen our writing teacher's hair? I did her hair, too" Carol said.

"Yeah, I've seen her hair. It's nice," I said.

"I told you that I cut hair well," Carol said.

"OK, then I should agree," I said.

"Why don't we do it after my four-thirty class?" Carol said.

"My last class finishes at three p.m. but I'll wait for you," I said.

I waited for her and went to her home, which was twenty minutes away by car. She had a big house on a mountain.

"This is my boyfriend's house. I live here with him," Carol said.

"Do you want to stay here tonight? We have plenty of room," Carol invited.

"I guess I'll have to. I'll call my friend, Valerie, and tell her I'm staying here," I said and called my friend.

Carol brought a small leather bag and a white cloth. She explained, "We'll cut your hair first, and then cook dinner."

She placed a wooden chair in front of a mirror in the living room. She used the white cloth to cover me from my neck to my feet. When I saw all her professional-looking hair-cutting equipment, I felt relaxed and said, "Please don't cut my hair too short."

"Lha mo, your hair is ruined. I'll try to cut away the damaged hair," Carol said.

"I know my hair is damaged, but I don't like very short hair, so please just cut the ends," I said.

"I understand perfectly what you want," Carol assured.

She cut. I heard the clipping sound of her scissors. I was

watching in the mirror, and it seemed that she was cutting my hair very short. I raised my right hand and touched my hair, which had become very short indeed.

"Don't worry, I'll make it even. I cut the ends, and now I'll try to make it even," Carol said.

"OK, but please don't make it any shorter," I said.

"Lha mo, just be patient and you'll see," Carol said.

I could see my hair becoming shorter and shorter. She couldn't make my hair even because it was curly, but she didn't want to admit this.

"I think it's good now," I said.

She stood in front of me and exclaimed, "My goodness! You look much better than when you had long, burned hair."

I could see myself in the mirror. I looked horrible, but I said, "Yeah, I think so. Thanks so much for your help."

"My pleasure," Carol said.

While I was sweeping up the hair on the floor, Carol went to shower. All her equipment was there, so I tried to make my hair even by looking in the mirror and clipping, but it was so messed up that I couldn't do anything. I tried to tie it up, but the hair on the back of my head was so short that it wouldn't tie. I felt miserable.

When Carol's boyfriend came home about an hour later, I was shocked when I realized he was in his late seventies.

"Honey, this is Lha mo, from Tibet. I helped her by cutting her hair," Carol said.

"Nice to meet you, Lha mo," Carol's boyfriend, Jack, said.

"Nice to meet you, too," I said.

"Carol is a wonderful person, who likes to help others," Jack said.

"Yes, she is truly good-hearted," I said.

"Your hair looks nice. She's the only one that cuts my hair," Jack said.

I knew that my hair was very odd looking, but I wasn't angry with Carol or anybody else. I was laughing at myself for being so naïve and listening to others.

When I went to school the next day all my classmates said, "What happened to your hair?"

I didn't want to say that my friend had cut my hair because it really looked awful, so I just said, "I cut it."

When I saw Valerie on the weekend, she exclaimed, "Lha mo!

Who cut your hair?"

"My friend. I know I look really bad," I said.

"My Lord, it looks dreadful. I told you that we could go to my hairdresser. Why did you let a stranger and an unprofessional touch your hair?" Valerie said.

"Actually, it's not her fault. Everybody said my hair looked terrible, so I wanted to get it fixed and didn't think too much about it," I said.

"I must take you to my hairdresser," Valerie insisted. That afternoon she took me to her hairdresser, who looked at my hair and smiled.

"I'll try to make it better, but you must know that whoever cut your hair really did a bad job. I can't do much with part of it," the hairdresser said.

"Please do whatever you can," I said.

It took the hairdresser a long time to finish. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I didn't see much improvement.

"Oh, that's much better!" Valerie said.

"Thanks," I said, and paid thirty dollars.

From that experience, I learned that I shouldn't listen to just anybody's opinion. I got a card and wrote on it, "There's no set path - follow your heart." I think that's so true. I must have my own way of life. People have different opinions, and I'll go crazy if I listen and try to follow them all. I'll never achieve my dreams.

Having your hair cut in an odd way or losing all your hair isn't a very big issue because hair regrows, but if I lose something I can never regain, I will be full of regret. My inner voice is wrong sometimes, but it's better to listen to my inner voice than listen to others.

DRUNK

Lha mo, do you want to go with us to eat chicken wings?" James, a schoolmate at College of Marin, asked me.

"Who else will come?" I asked.

"My sister, Judy, and her friend, Lisa, will join us," James said.

"Do you think I should go?" I said.

"Sure! I'm leaving tomorrow, so we should go out and have fun," James said.

"OK, give me five minutes. I need to change clothes," I said.

"Take your time. I'll be upstairs," James said.

"Thanks," I said and went to my room to change my clothes.

James drove us downtown. On the way he called his sister, who said that they needed another twenty minutes. We went to a bar where there were many gambling machines in a big dark room. If we put money in the machine we got credit. James was expert at gambling with such machines. He knew all the rules, but I was like an idiot and didn't know what to do. They gave us cups of beer. I knew that if we played there, they would give us free drinks. I thought that was tricky because people will gamble more after they get tipsy. James put twenty dollars in the machines and played many rounds before his money was gone.

There were many older people playing. James put two dollars in a machine and let me play, but I soon lost everything. He asked me to add more money, but I didn't want to. I knew gambling wouldn't make me rich.

About a half-hour later, we went to the restaurant to meet his sister and friend. I was shocked at the number of people there. We had to wait for about five minutes to get a seat.

We ordered six wings per person, and two plates of French fries and fried pickles. They came to us very fast. While I was at the table, I counted twenty-three TVs of varying sizes on the walls. Each showed something different – basketball, football, boxing, and so on. There were a couple of TVs for playing games. They gave us the

control for a big monitor. That was one of the oddest things I've ever experienced. There were many TVs, but people were busy talking and eating. I still don't understand the point of all those TVs.

James' friend, Lisa, treated us to dinner. She worked at a college, so her financial situation was better than ours. We wanted to buy Lisa a drink, but she didn't come with us after dinner to the bars.

"Lha mo, now we should go to a bar and have some drinks," Judy said.

"I hope it is a bar where we can dance," I said. Then we went to a bar where people gamble and drink. The bartender demanded, "Where's your ID?"

"Did you bring your ID?" James asked me.

"No, I didn't know we were going to a bar," I said.

"OK. We'll go back and get your ID," Lisa said.

James drove us back to get my ID. We returned to the bar and had vodka with cranberry juice. The first sip was very good. I thought one cup should be enough, so I drank it slowly. There weren't many people in the bar. I went to another room and saw a bunch of men gambling at a big table. There were also some gambling machines there. James used ten dollars to play on a machine. I accompanied him and saw again how much he enjoyed playing.

I was drunk before I finished my first drink. I have never liked wine or beer, but that night I felt like drinking. I was hoping for a cup of water, but James bought me another cocktail. Then I thought, "OK, Lha mo, experiment – once in a blue moon is OK."

I sat on a chair and drank. Judy came over and we chatted about my school and hers. She said, "You should transfer to my school. My school is much bigger and has more international students than your college."

I thought, "Great, if the tuition is cheaper."

While we were talking, a man in his fifties came up, pointed at me, and said, "Chinese?"

I said, "No sir, I'm Korean."

"Oh, nice," he said and left.

Gradually, I became dizzy. I said to Lisa, "I'm drunk, but my mind is still clear."

She confessed, "I'm drunk, too."

We were at the table. Two men and James came up. "These are two of my friends. They're good people," James said.

"What are you drinking?" said one of the men.

I said nothing and reached for my drink on the table. He laughed and said, "I'm not asking you to drink. I'm asking what you are drinking."

"I didn't mean to hide my drink from you," I said.

They were drunk, too. I really wanted to go back home, but I thought that James was leaving the next day, and we wouldn't see each other for long time. I felt more ill and suddenly knew I had to vomit. I said to Judy, "I need to go to the bathroom. I'll be back soon."

"I'll be here," Judy said.

On the way to the bathroom, I was so sick I clamped my mouth shut with my right hand and threw up as soon as I got into a stall. My chest hurt after I threw up, but vomiting helped me feel less drunk.

Somebody knocked on the door. It was Judy. "Are you all right?" she said.

"I'm OK," I said.

We returned to the table. James and the two men were talking. "We should go to another bar and have another drink," one of the men said.

"Really?" I said.

"Yeah, just to see what's going on there," James said.

It was raining when we got outside and drove to another bar. I felt I was in a dream. I told myself I wasn't drunk, but it didn't work.

We went inside another bar. There were many people gambling at machines, singing, and dancing. I wanted to dance, but I understood that I wouldn't be steady on my feet.

Somebody brought small cups of drinks to us and gave me one. I said, "No."

Everybody encouraged, "Lha mo, have a last drink."

I knew that I should refuse, but I wanted to drink, so I took it. I thought that I would be sick the next day but that it would be fine to have this experience once.

Another man joined us. He knew James. He talked a lot to me when he learned I was Tibetan. He said, "I have always wanted to go to Tibet."

"Tibet is a wonderful place to visit. I miss it a lot," I said. I felt worse than ever. I just wanted to go somewhere and rest.

"Lha mo, do you want to go home or stay longer?" James asked.

"I want to go home," I said.

As we walked downstairs to the first floor of the bar, I held the rail to steady myself.

"Are you OK?" Judy and James asked.

"I'm fine," I said.

They drove me home, and then I threw up again. I felt like hell. I said to myself, "Lha mo, never drink like this again. This is your first and last time. Now you know what it is like to be drunk, especially in an unfamiliar place with strangers around."

I went to my bedroom and tried to sleep, but my heart was burning and I had a headache. I could hardly get out of bed the next day. I think people who drink often and are regularly drunk are crazy. Getting happiness from drinking is silly. It is temporary happiness followed by illness.



I ride a friend's horse in Bozeman, Montana (August 2012, Nicole).

THE FUTURE

I was going to school in San Francisco but, a couple of semesters later, Marc Gold took me to visit his friend in Helena, Montana. I decided to spend the summer in Helena, because Montana, with its mountains and open places, reminded me of Tibet. While I was there, Marc's friend asked me if I wanted to stay in Helena and go to school at Carroll College. She and her husband would give me free room and board. College of Marin is a public community college, while Carroll is a well-known, private four-year college. However, Carroll was three times as expensive as College of Marin. We contacted Carroll, and were informed I would be given a partial scholarship. Marc also worked with a friend in a local foundation, which decided to partially sponsor me. This explains why and how I now attend Carroll College.

I'm sincerely honored to be a student at Carroll College. Carroll is over one hundred years old. It is a Catholic, liberal arts, and paraprofessional college in Helena, the state capital. There are few international students. People are very nice and the community is close knit. Helena itself isn't a very diverse community, but it has its advantages. The good thing is that it's a mountainous place with snow in winter, which I love. Carroll only has about 1,400 students, which means class size is small and the professors are always there to give a hand. As an international student, it is hard to fit into such a new environment easily; therefore, having helpful professors is wonderful. Because it is small, there are many opportunities to excel. I'm the president of the International Club, a senator in the student government, and a member of the Business Club, too. I like to interact with people and learn from them.

My biggest goal is to learn to teach. I want to learn the best teaching skills so I can train teachers to teach students in a critical and effective way when I return home. A key element for a country and a family is good education. Once parents send their children to schools, it is the teachers' responsibility to look after and educate them. Education includes learning how to be a moral, ethical, and

well-behaved person. Many more people go to school now than in the past, but most people lack exposure to important life lessons. They don't act like educated people.

It is difficult to adjust to being in a new place, but it's the best way to see and learn new things. Within a month I'll be twenty-five, but in the USA I'm still like a child, because I have to learn everything starting almost from scratch. I've just learned to ride a bike, and now I've started learning how to drive a car. I'm also learning how to play the guitar.

Before, I lacked confidence, courage, motivation, aspiration, and willpower. Since I arrived in the USA, I have encountered many obstacles. When I face difficulties, I don't blame anybody or any circumstance. Obstacles are an opportunity to make progress. Without change in our lives, we stay in the same spot. The challenges I have met have made me stronger.

I once thought that no one liked me, and no one thought that I could do anything important. Life has taught me that I must respect, cherish, and believe in myself, and then others will automatically trust and respect me. When I believe in myself, I have more potential.

I cherish my own culture more than I used to. I am proud and happy to have been born in my home place. I have a sense that my life isn't just for myself and my family. I have a responsibility to help not just Tibetans, but also all the humans on this earth.

We learn so much through our day-to-day lives. I want to gain experience while I am younger rather than older. Most people become experienced when they get older, because they learn things through their lives, but they cannot return to their youth.

Having a dream to help others is commendable, but I must take one step at a time and develop myself. Once I can stand solidly on my own two feet, I can help others. More education is very important for me to have this solid base, from which to realize my dreams.



At Carroll College, Helena, Montana (September 2012, Eliza Wiley).

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

B

'Bu chu འབྲུ་ཚུ། River

Bde chen བདེ་ཆེན། place name

Bde skyid བདེ་སྦྱིད། person's name

Beijing 北京 City, China's capital

Bkra shis བཀ་ཤེས། person's name

bla ma བླ་མ། Tibetan Buddhist religious figure

Blo bzang བློ་བཟང་། person's name

Brag 'go བར་འགོ། place name

Bsam 'grub བསམ་འགྲུབ། person's name

Bsam pa བསམ་པ། person's name

Bsod nams བསོད་ནམས། person's name

Bsod nams byams pa བསོད་ནམས་བྱམས་པ།

Bsod nams sgrol ma བསོད་ནམས་སྒྲོལ་མ། person's name

Bstan 'dzin བསྟན་འཛིན། person's name

Bstan ma བསྟན་མ། person's name

Bstan Pa བསྟན་པ། person's name

Bu བུ། nickname

Byams pa བྱམས་པ། person's name

Bzang mo བཟང་མོ། person's name

C

chao mian 炒面 fried noodles

Cheng 陈 person's name

Chengdu 成都 City

chong ཆོང་། vocable shouted when driving livestock in a particular direction

Chos sgron ཆོས་སྒྲོན། person's name

D

Dar rtse mdo དར་རྩེ་མདོ། place name

Dbang mo དབང་མོ། person's name

Dbang phyug དབང་ཕྱུག། person's name

Dga' ba དག་པ། person's name

Dkar mdzes དཀར་མཛེས། place name

Dpa' ldan chos mtsho དཔལ་ལྷན་ཚས་མཚོ། person's name

F

Fang 方 surname

G

G.yang 'dzoms གཡང་འཛོམས། person's name

G.yang skyid གཡང་སྐྱིད། person's name

Grags pa གྲགས་པ། person's name

Gser rta གསེར་རྟ། place name

Gser rta bla rung Monastery གསེར་རྟ་བླ་རུང་དགོན་པ།

J

'Jags dbyangs འཇགས་དབྱངས། person's name

'Jigs med འཇིགས་མེད། person's name

K

kha btags ཁ་བརྟགས། a piece of silk given as an offering or ceremonial greeting

Kun bzang ཀུན་བཟང། person's name

Kun dga' ཀུན་དགལ། person's name

Kun mchog ཀུན་མཚན། person's name

L

Lijiang 丽江 place name

Lha lha ལྷ་ལྷ། person's name

Lha mo ལྷ་མོ། person's name

Lha mo mtsho ལྷ་མོ་མཚོ། person's name

Lha sgron ལྷ་སྒོན། person's name

Lha skyid ལ་སྐྱིད། person's name

Lhag pa ལྷག་པ། person's name

Lha sa ལྷ་ས། City, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region

M

Mtsho mo མཚོ་མོ། person's name

Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔན། Normal University, Qinghai 青海 Normal University

N

Nor bu འོ་རུ། person's name

Nor bu khug འོ་རུ་ཁུག། Village

Nyi 'od ཉི་འོད། travel agency name

O

'Od rgyal འོད་རྒྱལ། person's name

'Od zer འོད་ཟེར། person's name

oM ma Ni pad+me hUM ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་པདྨེ་ཧཱུྃ། mantra

P

Pad+ma པདྨ། person's name

Panzhijia 攀枝花 place name

Phun tshogs ཕུན་ཚོགས། person's name

Potala, Po ta la པོ་ཏ་ལ།

Q

Qinghai 青海 Province

R

Rdza chu kha རྩ་ཅུ་ཁ། place name

Rgyal mtshan རྒྱལ་མཚན། person's name

Rin chen རིན་ཆེན། person's name

Rin po che རིན་པོ་ཆེ། treasure; high-ranking *bla ma*

Rnga ba རྩ་བ། place name

rtsam pa རྩམ་པ། roasted and ground barley

S

Sangs rgyas སངས་རྒྱལ། person's name

Sgrol ma སྒྲོལ་མ། person's name

Sgron ma སྒྲོན་མ། person's name

Shar kha ཤར་ཁ། place name

Shes rab ཤེས་རབ། person's name

Sichuan 四川 Province

Skar ma སྐར་མ། person's name

Smar khams སྐར་ཁམས། place name

T

Thub bstan ཐུབ་བསྟན། person's name

Tre hor ཐལ་ཁོར། place name

Tshe brtan ཚེ་བརྟན། person's name

Tshe lha ཚེ་ལྷ། person's name

Tshe ring ཚེ་རིང། person's name

Tshes bcu ཚེས་བཅུ། person's name

Tshes bcu lha mo ཚེས་བཅུ་ལྷ་མོ། person's name

U

U rgyan ལུ་རྒྱལ། person's name

W

Wuhouci 武侯祠 Street

X

Xining 西宁 City

Xianshui 鲜水 River

Y

Ya ma ཡ་མ། person's name

Ye shes ཡེ་ཤེས། person's name

Yon tan ཡོན་ཏན། person's name

yuan 元 Chinese currency unit

Z

Zhongdian 中甸 place name

Zi ling ཇི་ལིང། City

Zla ba ཇལ་པ། person's name